



MARY ANNE DISRAELI
*By A. E. Chalon, R.A., published in Heath's
"Book of Beauty," 1841*

Chaucer



MARY ANNE DISRAELI

*The Story of
Viscountess Beaconsfield*

By
James Sykes

*Foreword by
A. G. Gardiner*



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FOREWORD

TOLSTOY once accused Bernard Shaw of treating life as if it were a joke. Bernard Shaw replied that life was a joke, but that he wanted to "make it a good joke." It may be said of Disraeli that he regarded life, not as a joke, but as a comedy, and that he sought to make it a romantic comedy. Every phase of the adventure was conceived in this spirit and sustained with a mock solemnity that not only perplexed his own generation, but left posterity a theme of inexhaustible fascination. His genius was essentially histrionic, and the drama he staged had a rare uniformity of character. It was always in keeping with himself. It was with him as with his great contemporary, Irving. The player was always more significant than the play. The public went to see Irving regardless of the play. They went to see him because, no matter what the theme, his personality exhaled an atmosphere of strangeness and mystery that held the mind captive. You might dislike his subject or his treatment of his subject, but you could not be indifferent to his art or in-

Foreword

sensible to the nameless emotions that he awakened. There was an air of aloofness about him, a suggestion of fearsome secrets and unfathomable memories. Here was one who had had commerce with ghostly apparitions, or been with Dante into hell. You felt that he might take you aside, as Eugene Aram took the boy, and tell you the secret of some hidden pool.

And so with Disraeli. He had the same mastery of the technique of mystery, the same power of suggesting an alien and unexplored realm of experience and emotion. He did not fill the mind with shapes of gloom as Irving did. He filled it with the glamour of the East, and festooned it with the fancies of romance. For fifty years he held the stage by the magic of his bizarre and whimsical genius. He kept the world wondering what reality there was behind the mask of romantic irony that he wore. He himself never lifted the mask—never appeared outside the character he had conceived for himself from the beginning. And he remains as inscrutable a figure to posterity as he was to his contemporaries. No statesman of the past has engaged the attention of the biographers so much as he has done, but after all their researches and speculations the ultimate Disraeli escapes them as completely as he escaped

Foreword

those who watched him as he sat with pallid, immobile face and folded arms in the House of Commons. Tenniel pictured him sharing the secrets of the Sphinx, and in that elusive companionship he abides.

It is perhaps in the sidelights thrown upon him that we come nearest to the ultimate Disraeli, and in telling the story of Lady Beaconsfield, Mr. Sykes has gone as far as anyone in making him an intelligible and human figure to us. He casts a reflected light on the subject which is both revealing and pleasant. In his matrimonial relations Disraeli was as inexplicable to the world as in his more public aspects. But he was true to his unfailing character of the romantic ironist. There was a strong element of comedy in his relation with Mary Anne, but he invested the comedy with an atmosphere of chivalrous fancy that is not a little reminiscent of the devotion of Don Quixote to Dulcinea del Tobosa. It is true that Dulcinea was a figment of the brain while Mary Anne was a most surprising and indisputable fact; but she was a fact around whom Disraeli wove as rich a garland of romantic fancy as that of the Don.

The industry of Mr. Sykes has cleared away many of the legends that were current about Mrs. Disraeli,

Foreword

and his picture reveals a woman of more engaging character than that which tradition has endowed her with. Her instincts were generous and uncalculating. She was rich in that quality which the famous wife of another Prime Minister loves to call "nature." Within certain limits her capacity was conspicuous, and apart from the Disraelian episode, the attachment of her first husband to her is evidence that she was not without feminine appeal. She was an excellent woman of affairs, who, it appears, erred in the opinion of the shopkeepers of High Wycombe on the side of niggardliness. It is not apparent that she penetrated the Disraelian mask more successfully than others did, but she accepted the mask as the reality, and her devotion to her "Dizzy" was an all-absorbing worship. It was a worship that had more of the maternal than the marital passion in it. She adored him as an over-fond mother adores a precocious child.

But in spite of the not unattractive presentment that Mr. Sykes offers, the mystery of Disraeli's marriage to her remains unsolved. She was twelve years older than he was, and whatever personal charms she had in youth had faded when the brilliant and ambitious adventurer of thirty-four accompanied her to the altar. Disraeli, after his first

Foreword

meeting with her had written her down as a tiresome chatterbox, and a chatterbox she remained to the end. It is not to be supposed that the choice was forced upon him by the lack of opportunities of other and more superficially attractive alliances. Disraeli was already a celebrity. He was looked at askance by the governing society he was to subdue, but he moved in the best intellectual circles, was a politician of mark, and had social gifts which made him as attractive to women as to men. There remains the crude suggestion that he married Mrs. Lewis for her money, a suggestion that is supported by his own confession that "gratitude" was the link that bound him to her. But the circumstances in which that explanation was given discredit it, or at all events disentitle it to be taken at its face value. When one has been asked a rude question one may, as Johnson says, answer as one pleases. It is true that Disraeli at the time he married was heavily in debt. But that was a condition to which he was habituated, not merely before his marriage, but afterwards, and he always carried his monetary obligations lightly. He did not allow them either to disturb his activities or to affect his spirits. Moreover, even if he regarded money as the chief desideratum in marriage, it is not likely that Mrs. Lewis

Foreword

presented him with the only chance of marrying prosperously. She was well-to-do according to the standards of those days, but not excessively rich, and as Lewis had left her only a life interest in his fortune, she would, in the event of her death—which in view of their relative ages was likely to precede Disraeli's—leave her husband, so far as her wealth was concerned, as bankrupt as she found him. Without disregarding the importance of her means to him, therefore, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Disraeli married Mary Anne Lewis because she had the homely, domestic qualities which offered so startling a contrast to his own tastes and temper, and which he desired in his intimate life. He was a poseur to the world, but he wanted a refuge from the pose, and he found it in the good-natured, volatile little lady who worshipped him, kept his housekeeping accounts in order, trimmed and, it was suspected, dyed his hyacinthine locks, plastered down his famous curl, pulled the string of his shower-bath, and saw that he came home to a well-lit room and an abundant table, no matter what the hour.

And having made the bargain on very practical considerations, he carried it out in the spirit of the romantic lover. Society might “cut” the singular

Foreword

woman he had taken to his heart, and the world might make fun of her *gaucheries*, but to him she was the object of a constant and knightly attention. If he winced under her extravagances and levities of speech and action, he gave no sign, but remained as grave and impassive as in the face of public attack. His faithfulness to her was never questioned. He crowned the curious romance by using his influence with the Queen to raise her to the peerage while he still remained a commoner. There are few more singular love stories in the records of the great, and in "restoring" the picture of Mary Anne Disraeli and clearing it of the accretions of the gossipmonger, the author has incidentally thrown a new and agreeable light on the most baffling and enigmatic figure in the annals of British statesmanship.

A. G. GARDINER.



CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD, BY A. G. GARDINER	V
INTRODUCTION	I
CHAPTER	
I. LEGEND AND GOSSIP	21
II. BIRTH AND PARENTAGE	35
III. EARLY YEARS AND FIRST MARRIAGE	47
IV. FIRST ASSOCIATION WITH DISRAELI	59
V. A BRIEF WIDOWHOOD	73
VI. THE PERFECT WIFE	93
VII. THE "GAY LADY" AT SHREWSBURY	107
VIII. ANECDOTAL	117
IX. AT THE COUNTRY HOUSES	133
X. THE LADY OF HUGHENDEN	145
XI. IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH	161
XII. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES	171
XIII. ROYAL FAVOUR	185
XIV. VISCOUNTESS BEACONSFIELD	197
XV. THE FIGHT AGAINST DEATH	211
XVI. CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY	231
INDEX	243



ILLUSTRATIONS

MARY ANNE DISRAELI	<i>frontispiece</i>	
By A. E. Chalon, R.A., published in Heath's "Book of Beauty," 1841		FACING PAGE
BRAMPFORD SPEKE, DEVON, HOME OF THE EVANS FAMILY UNTIL 1807	40	
WYNDHAM LEWIS, M.P.	52	
From a portrait in possession of Mrs. Murray-Thriep- land		
GROSVENOR GATE, LADY BEACONSFIELD'S LONDON HOUSE	62	
BENJAMIN DISRAELI IN 1835	70	
From a sketch by Count D'Orsay		
HUGHENDEN MANOR AND TERRACE GARDEN . .	148	
THE DRAWING-ROOM AT HUGHENDEN IN 1873 .	152	
THE DRAWING-ROOM AT HUGHENDEN, PRESENT TIME	156	
LETTER FROM MARY ANNE DISRAELI TO BENJAMIN DISRAELI	174	
LETTER FROM MARY ANNE DISRAELI TO DUCHESS OF NORTHUMBERLAND	206	
LADY BEACONSFIELD'S COAT OF ARMS	208	



INTRODUCTION





IN any comparative estimate of the wives of Queen Victoria's ten Prime Ministers, a conspicuous place must be given to Viscountess Beaconsfield. Though not distinguished by exceptional talent or achievement, she had a peculiar individuality, which marked her out distinctively from the others, and while she lacked the gifts and graces which qualified most of these ladies for participation in socio-political activities, none contributed more effectively to the success of her husband's career. That she alone received the personal honour of a patent of nobility is a mark of distinction, but testimony rather to the Royal esteem for her husband than to any merit of her own. Moreover, she did not in this respect stand alone. A peerage was offered by Queen Victoria to Lady Peel after the tragic death of Sir Robert, but was declined, he having left a direction that no member of his family was to accept any honour in consideration of services he had rendered to the State.

On a cursory survey of the home life of the Vic-

torian Prime Ministers, the most turbulent seems to have been that of Lord Melbourne, the most serene that of Disraeli. This may be a bold thing to say when we consider the happy amenities of Drayton Manor and Pembroke Lodge, of Hawarden Castle and Hatfield House, but it may fairly be doubted whether the head of any of these households was given the placid life which Disraeli enjoyed at Hughenden. In the bringing up of a family there are inevitable disturbances to serenity, however amply these may be outbalanced by domestic compensations. Disraeli was spared the anxieties of parenthood, and its joys do not seem to have greatly attracted him. Certainly he did not expect, and probably he did not desire, to have a house cumbered by children. Throughout his life he preferred the society of elderly women to the charms of youth, and when he married he followed the example of Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield, who "chose his wife as she did her wedding gown, not for a fine glossy surface, but for such qualities as wear well." He selected a lady of mature age, who would give him a pacific haven from the storms which beat about him during the whole of his public career. It is true that the financial aid she brought was at the time of their marriage even more important to him than

Introduction

her personal qualifications as wife and companion, but the belief that he married her solely or mainly for her money is rather strained by a candid examination of the facts. There were in the society he frequented not a few young ladies of fortune who might probably have been willing to ally themselves with the brilliant young author and politician had he chosen to employ his powers of fascination to that end. Mr. T. E. Kebbel, in his "Tory and Other Memories," says a former Dean of Salisbury told him how Disraeli used to say jokingly to his wife: "You know I married you for your money." "Yes," she would reply, "but if you were to marry me again, you'd marry me for love, wouldn't you?" "Oh yes," he would exclaim, and the little nuptial comedy ended. The story has been told in various forms, and has little significance. In the light of all we know now, it is impossible to doubt that there was genuine affection on both sides, and that in asking her hand he was, though not indifferent to the monetary aspect of the alliance, influenced in large degree by a conviction that her companionship would be congenial to him, and that she would give him that kind of home his nature and circumstances required.

The only other Victorian Prime Minister who had no issue was Lord Palmerston, and his life, public

and private, differed in almost every other respect from that of Disraeli. The "great game," which Palmerston played with so much zest, was made easy for him by his environment and connections, and his resilient, combative spirit quickly brought him to the front after every reverse.

Passing at the critical moment from one party to the other, he held political office longer than any other man of the nineteenth century, and the chief function of his wife was to aid in the maintenance and consolidation of his position in the State. When married they were both over fifty years of age. Sister to another Prime Minister (Lord Melbourne), and widow of Earl Cowper, she brought to his service a great social influence. At Cambridge House, Piccadilly (which became afterwards the Naval and Military Club), her dinners and receptions were leading events of the London season. Referring to one of these, Lord Broughton ("Recollections of a Long Life") says it was in Lady Palmerston's day that an evening party at a Minister's house began to be called a reception. Thus by her aid many a wavering politician was attached to a leader who was never really either a Liberal or a Conservative.

Palmerston's principal rival was another leader of the Liberal party, Lord John Russell. Palmerston

Introduction

got the better of the contest, and died in the harness of the Premiership. Lord John's first wife (a daughter of Lord Ribblesdale) died young, and in 1841 he married secondly Lady Frances Elliot, daughter of the Earl of Minto. To use the words of Lord John's nephew, Mr. G. W. E. Russell, she was for thirty-five years the good angel of her husband's house. In their pleasant home at Pembroke Lodge, Richmond, they led with their children an ideal family life, and entertained the cream of the intellectual people of their day. When Earl Russell (as he had then become) retired from public life in 1873, Disraeli—recently bereaved—wrote to him: "In your retirement you have the inestimable happiness of constant and accomplished sympathy, without which life is worth little. Mine is lone and dark." The Countess's life of beneficent activity was prolonged for many years after the loss of her husband. On her death, in 1898, at the age of eighty-two, Mr. Frederic Harrison summed up her character in a striking sentence. "She came," he said, "of a race of soldiers, governors, and tried servants of the State, and she married into a race which has long stood in the front rank of the historic servants of the Crown and of the people, but neither the house of Elliot nor that of Russell, in so many generations, ever had man or

woman with a keener sense of public duty, a more generous nature, or a more magnanimous soul." Lord Bryce declared that she always seemed to him one of the most noble and beautiful characters he had ever known.

Of the ten Prime Ministers, Lord Melbourne alone was unfortunate in his marriage, and happily we may exclude from the survey the sparkling Lady Caroline Lamb. She died before the opening of the Victorian era, and before Lord Melbourne became the head of a Ministry, and though her scandalous vagaries, and the imbecility of his only son, cast a shadow over the whole of his life, his political career, at least in its more important stages, was not materially affected by his domestic troubles.

In striking contrast were the marital experiences of his successor in the Premiership. Sir Robert Peel was thirty-two years of age when he married Julia Floyd, daughter of a distinguished soldier. It was without doubt a love match, and that they were lovers to the end there is abundant testimony in the private letters published by Mr. George Peel in 1920. Throughout their twenty-six years of union he constantly addressed his wife as "My own dearest Love," "My darling Love," or in similar terms of affection, closing with an endearing subscription, such

Introduction

as "Ever, my own dearest Julia, most lovingly and affectionately yours." Her responses were equally tender. When Guizot visited Drayton Manor a few years before Peel's death, he found there "a beautiful home life, great and simple, well ordered and on a goodly scale"; and Mr. George Peel dwells on the intense devotion of the parents, and "the large family of sons who were to be distinguished, and of daughters who were to be brilliant and beautiful."

The home life of Lord Aberdeen was the most pathetic of the series. It was chequered by intermittent sorrows, and though twice married he had been a widower nearly twenty years when he formed Queen Victoria's only Coalition Ministry. When yet scarcely of age, he fell passionately in love with the eldest daughter of the Marquess of Abercorn. Never a robust woman, she was spared to him less than seven years, and after he had lost her he declared that she was "the most perfect being whom God in His power ever created." His son, Lord Stanmore, describes her as "one of those bright and rare beings who seem rather to rest on the earth's surface than to belong to it." She left three daughters, who seem to have inherited her constitutional weakness. One after the other faded away, and the last of them died at the age of twenty. In the meantime he had married

again, but soon after the death of the third daughter the health of the second wife began to fail, and a lingering illness ended fatally in 1833. In the following spring her only daughter died, in her sixteenth year, the last of a band of beautiful girls. They were members of great Scottish families. Aberdeen himself being a Gordon, his first wife a Hamilton, and the second a Douglas.

Two of the Victorian Prime Ministers, Derby and Salisbury, were crossed in love; both chose ladies of whom their fathers disapproved. The fourteenth Earl of Derby was elected to the House of Commons a few weeks before he came of age, and soon afterwards lost his heart to Emma Caroline Wilbraham, daughter of a Lancashire squire. His father did not deem the alliance suitable for one who was to become the head of the great house of Stanley. After some delay, the parental objections were overcome, and a few years after the marriage, Mr. Wilbraham was raised to the peerage as Lord Skelmersdale. Though Lord Derby was three times Prime Minister, a classical scholar of high attainment, and a great sportsman, no full or official record of his life has been published, and for a knowledge of his domestic affairs one is dependent on casual references. These indicate that Lady Derby fulfilled with fidel-

Introduction

ity, in London and at Knowsley, the duties falling to the wife of a leading statesman and a territorial magnate of almost princely station. Their married life lasted forty-three years, and the old Countess survived her husband seven years. When she died in 1876, Henry Reeve, writing to her eldest son (the fifteenth Earl, then Foreign Minister in Disraeli's Cabinet), said few women had seen life played out on a nobler scale. "She was," he added, "the link between two generations of statesmen, and lived in the entire intimacy and affection of both."

The Marquess of Salisbury found the paternal opposition to his union with the lady of his choice more formidable than that which had checked the wooing of young Stanley. She was the eldest daughter of Sir Edward Alderson, Baron of the Exchequer, a man of ability and distinction, but of no fortune. Lord Salisbury's father, having ten children, warned him, as a younger son, against taking a bride who could have but a meagre dowry, and it was agreed that for a period of six months the young couple should neither see nor correspond with each other. Absence had the proverbial effect, and though the father still disapproved the match, they were married in 1857. During the earlier years of house-keeping their financial condition was precarious, but

Mary Anne Disraeli

on the death of his elder brother Lord Robert became heir to the title and estates. His wife, a year or two older than himself, was a high-spirited and accomplished lady, and her children, as everyone knows, have inherited the intellectual qualities of their parents. Lady Gwendolen Cecil, in the biography of her father, gives an appreciative, but discriminating, analysis of the character of Lady Salisbury, which, she says, both in its contrasts with his own and in those things which they had in common, was eminently fitted to make for the happiness of her husband.

The union of Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone was the longest of those included in this survey. They were married in July, 1839, a month before the Disraelis, and simultaneously Mrs. Gladstone's younger sister married Lord Lyttelton. The ladies were daughters of Sir Stephen Glynne, the eighth of a line of baronets, and among their forbears on the maternal side were three Prime Ministers. Despite her political ancestry Mrs. Gladstone was not a keen politician. It was not until her husband had wrecked his fortunes on the rock of Home Rule that she came into the political arena, at the age of seventy-five, as first President of the Women's Liberal Federation. Her experiences in that capacity were not happy. A feud

Introduction

arose among the ladies on the subject of female suffrage, and after unsuccessful attempts at pacification, she resigned her presidency in 1892. As wife and mother she was an admirable woman. By the big Lyttelton family she was known as "Auntie Pussy," and when she was away nursing one of them in 1875 another niece (Lady Frederick Cavendish) wrote in her diary that "Uncle W." was quite lost and bewildered without her. In the last year of his life, Mr. Gladstone said it would not be possible to unfold in words the value of the gifts which the bounty of Providence had conferred upon him through her. It was not only that she had a sedative effect upon his febrile and sensitive spirit; she tended his bodily health with a homely, motherly care. He once told the Duchess of Sutherland he had great faith in his wife as a physician—or "intensive confidence," as he phrased it characteristically. She had, he said, "a kind of divining power, springing partly from an habitual gift and partly from experience, and she hardly ever goes wrong." They were within a few months of their diamond wedding when he died, and Lord Rosebery expressed a firm belief that her tender care had sustained and prolonged his life.

Lord Rosebery himself was less fortunate. His wife, Hannah, was the only child and heir of Baron

Mary Anne Disraeli

Meyer de Rothschild. Losing her mother when yet a child, she was the constant companion of her father until his death in 1874. Four years afterwards she married the Earl of Rosebery. She remained a Jewess in religion, and Lord Beaconsfield, then Prime Minister, "gave away" this child of his race. She brought to her husband great wealth, including Mentmore, the splendid place in Buckinghamshire which she inherited from her father. Carefully educated, with well-cultivated literary and artistic tastes, she was eminently qualified to share the high station her husband was destined to take. At Mentmore she was the Lady Bountiful, and her aid was given to many philanthropic causes, especially to Jewish charities. She entertained at Lansdown House when Lord Rosebery was a member of Mr. Gladstone's Ministries in the 'eighties, and gave receptions at the Foreign Office during his brief tenure there in 1886. But she did not live to see him Prime Minister; she died of typhoid fever at Dalmeny in November, 1890.

It will be seen that but one of these ladies was and remained plain "Mrs."; and she was closely connected with several noble families, Mrs. Gladstone's mother being the daughter of a baron and niece of a marquess. While Mary Anne Disraeli alone became

Introduction

a peeress in her own right, she was excelled by all the others in that social prestige which in those days counted so much in the manœuvres and mutations of the political field. Under a restricted franchise, and with their own sex entirely excluded, the aristocratic dames wielded a weapon which has now lost most of the potency it possessed in the Victorian era. Disraeli always recognised the value of the dining table and drawing-room factor in the game of politics. Soon after acquiring a London house, he began to entertain members of Parliament and peers who might be useful to him, and even when at the plenitude of his power he lamented meagreness of the support his party received from the great ladies. Writing to Lady Bradford in 1876, he said the death at that juncture of the Dowager Countess of Derby was most unfortunate for the Conservative party, as he had counted on a series of receptions at the Foreign Office by the younger Lady Derby. "With forty years of political experience," he said, "I never knew a party so deserted by all social influence as ours. I wonder how they are kept together—not a solitary dinner or a single drum"; *i.e.*, kettledrum, or afternoon tea.

The most kindly estimate of the good qualities of Lady Beaconsfield will not place her on a level with

these other ladies in social authority, in personal charm, or in intellectual culture. She could play effectively, if not very gracefully, the part of hostess, but her chief value as her husband's auxiliary lay in the self-sacrificing sympathy and devotion which made her, for a man of his needs and temperament, "the perfect wife." When she died in December, 1872, *The Times* deemed her impress upon English public life to have been of sufficient importance to make it the subject of a leading article. Describing her marriage with Benjamin Disraeli as an historical event, the writer asked "who would have thought thirty-five years ago that the coming history of English public life would take a direction from the unselfish affection of a woman, and a woman not marked by any unusual capacities?" It was not merely that at a critical point in his advance to great station she relieved him of financial difficulties so heavy and embarrassing as to threaten overwhelming disaster. "She gave herself to him, and had no other object than his success in life. Such a woman, in spite of many apparent deficiencies, was able to give to a nature at once powerful and generous the very aid it needed."

The writer of the biographical notice in the same issue of *The Times* (a familiar friend, Mr. Wilfrid

Introduction

Meynell states) expanded the editorial eulogy, and recalled, as a parallel to Disraeli's devotion to his wife, the feeling expressed by Mahomet when he lost the loving woman he had married in the days of comparative obscurity. "By God," exclaimed the prophet, in an outburst of respectful gratitude, as he raised her to the rank of the Four Perfect Women—"By God, there never was a better wife; she believed in me when men despised me, she relieved my wants when I was poor and despised by the world." The quotation was apt, but a more appropriate parallel is the testimony to wifely devotion which Pliny wrote to the aunt of Calphurnia: "She has now a fondness for letters which springs from affection for me. She keeps my books by her, loves to read them, and even learns them by heart. How anxious she is when she sees I am going to speak! how delighted when I have spoken! Her passion will increase with our days, for it is not my youth nor my person, which time gradually impairs, but my reputation and my glory, of which she is enamoured. These things make me feel a most certain hope that there will be a perpetual and ever-growing harmony between us." Mary Anne Disraeli was much older than her husband, Calphurnia much younger than Pliny, but there is a close resemblance between the domestic en-

couragement and support given to the English statesman and author and that given to her spouse by the Roman lady of old, and their affection had a similar origin and the same guarantee of permanence.

Additional interest is given to the story of her life by an element of romance which made it in this respect complementary to that of Disraeli. Though the position from which she rose was less lowly than has been supposed, she did not, like most of the other wives of the Prime Ministers, spring from the ranks of the "ruling families." She made no pretence to high birth, and seems rather to have encouraged, in her vivacious volubility, the supposition that her early days were days of hardship. The discrepancy of the records gave colour to the fables which gained currency, and it has been my endeavour to dispel the atmosphere of mystery which long surrounded her personality. The information here given has been gathered from many sources—by private inquiry and research, and from books and articles so various that it would be futile to append a bibliography. Throughout her long life we see her but in glimpses, often distorted, and it is not easy to winnow the fact from the fiction.

The subject tempts to more decorative treatment. One might readily envisage a dramatic story, open-

Introduction

ing, say, with the wooing of the twin sisters by the gay young officers at Plymouth, followed by the double wedding in 1789; the adventures and tragic end of Lieut. Evans, and the distress of his widow; a conjectured chance meeting of Isaac Disraeli at Exeter some years later with the little girl who was destined long afterwards to become his daughter-in-law; the deaths of the last of the Evans family in 1807, and break up of the old home at Brampford Speke; and so forth. But this being a first biography of the lady, I have thought it best to set out the facts without amplification, and one may hope the result will be a contribution of some value to the political history of the nineteenth century, as throwing a reflective light on the career of one of its most remarkable men.

Among many to whom I am indebted for assistance, I would mention especially the Beaconsfield Trustees and Mr. Buckle, who have kindly enabled me to reproduce in facsimile two of the letters of Lady Beaconsfield hitherto unpublished, and to make brief extracts from the monumental biography of Disraeli written by Mr. Buckle and the late Mr. Monypenny. My thanks are due also to members of the Lewis family, and for my friend Mr. Gardiner's Foreword, too, I am very grateful.



I. LEGEND AND GOSSIP





AT the time of her death, and long afterwards, little was known of Lady Beaconsfield's origin and early years. The compilers of works of reference did not agree as to her age, her parentage, her place of birth, or her maiden name, and even official documents differed on some of these points. There was on the one hand an apparent effort to elevate the status of her family; on the other hand there were reports, based on authority apparently respectable, which ascribed to her a humble origin, and a girlhood passed in sordid surroundings. In his "Unconventional Biography" of Lord Beaconsfield, published in 1903, Mr. Meynell said that of the birth and upbringing of Disraeli's wife "some mystery has been made where none was." Yet he was himself three years wrong in the date of her birth, and in his account of her parentage her mother was confused with her grandmother. This latter error was probably typographical, as there was no doubt about the lady's maternal progenitors. On the paternal side, however, the records were extremely dubious. The late

Mr. Monypenny, after he had examined the material for the authorised "Life of Disraeli," said, in reply to an inquiry, that he found Lady Beaconsfield's father a very shadowy figure. An article by Mr. J. Henry Harris, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1903, threw a good deal of light on this subject, though his conclusions are found to be wrong in some particulars. The facts that can now be given are sufficient to remove all doubt as to her ancestry and birth, and to establish the falsity of many of the stories of her early years which have been told with so much confidence. It seems necessary, therefore, to state briefly what these stories were, and trace them, so far as possible, to their origin.

Among the fictions, none is more circumstantial, and none more fantastic, than that which fills the greater part of a chapter in Dr. James Mavor's "My Windows on the Street of the World." This book of reminiscences was published so lately as the year 1923, and as the narrative purporting to depict the life of Mary Anne with her first and second husbands was accepted without question by at least one reviewer, in a leading literary journal in London, it cannot be left unnoticed in an attempt to marshal the facts of her career.

The story is, in brief, that she and her first hus-

Legend and Gossip

band, Mr. Wyndham Lewis, kept a haberdashery shop in the East End of London, living on the premises, with an income sufficient only for simple needs. One morning Mr. Lewis discovered that an uncle had left him a fortune of about £80,000, "with the singular asset of 400 feather beds, which were not immediately saleable." Mrs. Lewis was "a sprightly person, whose attendance at the haberdashery counter was an affliction to be endured rather than the occupation of her choice." When, therefore, this fortune came to them, she resolved to effect an entry into the great world. As it was first necessary that her husband should become a gentleman, she was advised that the best way to effect this was to make him a barrister, which was easy enough if he had a good appetite, for it was merely a matter of eating dinners at one of the Inns of Court. The advice was taken, and Mr. Lewis "became a barrister at law and legally a gentleman." The lady was next advised by her confidante to set up a good house in a fashionable quarter, suitable for the entertainment of Society people. She did so, and a lady of title was paid £1,000 to get invitations for the Lewises, and another £1,000 to induce Society people to visit them. Mrs. Lewis next resolved to get her husband into Parliament, and as he was a poor speaker, the lady

friend undertook to procure an impecunious and clever young man who would do the speaking for him. Hence the introduction to her of Disraeli, "by particular desire," at a party given by the Lytton Bulwers. A vacancy occurring at Maidstone, Lewis, with the aid of Disraeli, won the seat, and when the second seat at Maidstone became vacant, Disraeli secured it for himself. Lewis died the following year, and soon afterwards Disraeli married the widow.

This brings the narrative into the region of fact, but fiction soon reappears. The lady's fortune having been dissipated by heavy election expenses and payment of Disraeli's debts, they had to leave the house at Grosvenor Gate, where the Lewises had lived, sold the furniture, and took a small house. They employed but one domestic, and Disraeli when at home dined on a steak and a pot of porter, brought from the nearest chop house.

Of this story it is sufficient to say here that Wyndham Lewis was admitted at Lincoln's Inn three years before his marriage and had been a barrister and a member of Parliament twelve or thirteen years when he first met Disraeli, and that the Disraelis continued to reside at the Grosvenor Gate house until the death of Lady Beaconsfield. Mr. Mavor admits that he got

Legend and Gossip

the story second or third hand. It was told to him about the year 1888 by Sir David MacVail, a Glasgow physician, who said his authority for it was a lady who was an early friend of Lady Beaconsfield, the "confidante" alluded to. Dr. Mavor disclaims responsibility for the detail, but the fact that a man in his position, and so well-informed on many subjects, should at this late date have given currency to statements so absurdly wide of the truth affords some justification for placing on record what is known of Lady Beaconsfield's life.

A legend more familiar is that Disraeli's wife was originally a factory girl, whom Wyndham Lewis saw going to her work in bare feet. Attracted by her beauty, he "picked her up," had her educated, and married her. After being some time in private circulation, this story was published by Mr. Augustus Hare in his *Reminiscences*, about the end of the nineteenth century. He stated that it was told to him by Mrs. Duncan Stewart, and, in answer to an inquiry, he stated that it was confirmed by Dean Vaughan, of Llandaff, from what he had heard in the neighbourhood of Greenmeadow, Lewis's home near Cardiff. Mrs. Stewart's narrative was embellished with detail as to Disraeli having lived at Greenmeadow as Lewis's secretary, and how, when the house was full

of guests, he was sent to sleep at Holly Bush, a public-house in the village.

Here again somebody blundered egregiously. Mrs. Stewart was a friend of the Disraelis throughout their married life, lived in Sloane Street, and appears to have been a voluble gossip. Mr. Lionel Robinson, in a letter written after the publication of Mr. Hare's book, said he recollected having found her deeply immersed in the MS. of the *Reminiscences*, which Mr. Hare had lent to her. In reply to a remark of Mr. Robinson that he hoped these memories of the past would be no less vivid than her own, she said they would at any rate be more discreet. She said nothing then of the factory girl story—perhaps because Mr. Robinson was related to the Disraelis—and nobody can tell how it originated. Mr. Lewis had a natural daughter, married and living in Ireland at the time of his death, on whom he settled an annuity, and Mr. J. H. Harris suggests that her mother may have been the factory girl of whom Mrs. Stewart had heard. Mrs. Lewis had no children of her own, but adopted a little girl, who lived with her until her marriage with Disraeli, and became subsequently Mrs. Riches, of Cardiff. This, in a confused way, may have some connection with the origin of the story, though Mrs. Riches cannot

have been a factory girl, as she was only three years old when adopted by Mrs. Lewis.

Again, the statement has appeared, in various forms, that in her early days Lady Beaconsfield was a milliner, either on her own account or as an apprentice or assistant. When one of these statements appeared in the Press in 1902, Sir Edward Russell, of Liverpool, wrote a letter in which he said he had been told indirectly, on the authority of Sir Stafford Northcote (first Lord Iddesleigh) that once when Lady Beaconsfield was staying with Sir Stafford at Pynes, near Exeter, she privately asked her host to take her for a drive, and on reaching a certain point in Exeter she said to him: "That is the shop where I was a milliner." Another writer said that in 1881, when gathering material for a biography of Lord Beaconsfield, an old lady who had been a companion to Lady Beaconsfield in her younger days, told him that before her first marriage she kept a milliner's shop in Bath or Exeter. Yet another writer said that a former postmistress of Chepstow, whose family had been long connected with the place, informed him that Mary Anne Evans's father left her very poorly provided for, and she took a situation in a milliner's shop at Chepstow, which the postmistress indicated.

These reports elicited the following interesting note from Lady Hobhouse, sister of the first Countess of Iddesleigh, which appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* of September 2nd, 1902:

“About forty-four years ago Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli visited us at Pynes. Driving with me one day, she said she should like to see Brampford Speke, as her parents lived there; her father was a captain in the merchant service and had made a runaway match with her mother. She asked me how old I was when I married, and I answered I married young, between nineteen and twenty. She said, ‘Do you call that young? I married at fifteen.’ She said she lived at Brampford Speke as a girl, and I am certain she was never a milliner’s apprentice. She added: ‘I have tried marrying a man much older than myself and one much younger, and with both I have been perfectly happy.’ ”

The reference is evidently to the same visit as that of which Sir Edward Russell wrote. It will be seen later how that visit came to be paid, and there is no trace of Mrs. Disraeli having been at Pynes on any other occasion. The two accounts are curiously discrepant, and Sir Edward’s being hearsay, is the less trustworthy. But in Lady Hobhouse’s memorandum

there are several inaccuracies, and it is difficult to believe that they are due to imperfect recollection of what Mrs. Disraeli said to her. That the father was a captain in the merchant service (whereas he was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy) is a minor error which may be ascribable to this cause, but the statements that her parents made a runaway match, and that she herself was married very young (whereas she was twenty-three), cannot well be so regarded. Indeed, the story told by Lady Hobhouse gives support to a conclusion one is tempted to draw from other facts and inferences—that Mary Anne herself was responsible for some of the romantic fiction which came to be associated with her early days.

The age of Lady Beaconsfield was in her day a prolific subject of gossip and conjecture. Sir William Fraser, with characteristic hyperbole, went so far as to say (in "Disraeli and his Day") that this was one of the most interesting circumstances in relation of Mr. Disraeli to one-half the human race. He quotes Lady Jersey as having affirmed positively in 1863 that she was then eighty years old—when, in fact, she was in her seventy-first year. Did her husband himself know the truth as to her birth and parentage? Probably not; he was curiously indifferent to detail of this kind. He knew that December

21st was the anniversary of his own birth, but he was always uncertain about the year, and the public records differed. It was not until some time after his death that the facts were ascertained beyond doubt. When Dr. Brewster published his scrappy biography in 1890, he was unable to say positively where his subject was born, or in what year—1804, 1805, or 1806. If Disraeli did know his wife's age, it is strange that it should have been incorrectly stated in the registration of her death. Did he know much of her father? The late Lord Rowton told the present writer he had it from Disraeli himself that she was the daughter of Captain John Viney Evans. But her father was not a captain, and Viney was no part of his name. He was simply John Evans, and had no higher rank than lieutenant. The record made at the College of Arms when the peerage was granted to Mrs. Disraeli described her father as Commander. The editor of Burke's Peerage (introducing a hyphen) said he was Captain John Viney-Evans, having assumed the name of Evans, and her mother was Eleanor Scrope Evans, his wife and cousin. She did not bear the name of Scrope, and was not her husband's cousin. In Dod's "Parliamentary Companion" the father's name was given as John Evans, Esq., down to 1867, and was then altered to Captain

Legend and Gossip

John Evans, R.N., why, or at whose instance, cannot now be ascertained. "G. E. C." (Mr. Cokayne), setting out the record of Lady Beaconsfield in his very elaborate compilation "The Complete Peerage of England," has four or five errors of a similar kind. In Mr. Wolford's *Life of Disraeli*, Brampford Speke, the father's home, was magnified into a mythical Branceford Park.

The only authority, until quite recent years, which purported to give her exact age was Doyle's "Baronage of England," where it was stated that she was born on November 11th, 1798. This would make her seventy-four at the time of her death; *The Times* biography said she was eighty-three; in the registration of her death it was recorded that she was aged seventy-six. They were all wrong; the correct figure was eighty.

We may now leave the region of error and conjecture, and come to the ascertained facts.



II. BIRTH AND PARENTAGE





THROUGHOUT the eighteenth century there lived at Brampford Speke (or Bampford Speke), a pretty village overlooking the river Exe, some five miles from Exeter, a family or families of Evanses. In the old registers of the parish a good many of these are found to have borne the name of John or Eleanor, and it was a John and Eleanor who were grandparents of Lady Beaconsfield. The fact that her father also was John and that her mother happened to be named Eleanor may have led to the erroneous statement in some of the records that they were cousins. While the Evanses were farmers, Mary Anne's mother was of higher rank in the social scale, had no consanguinity with them, and came from another part of the country. She was of a family of Vineys, who owned estates in and near the city of Gloucester, and were connected with other county families. In the letterpress attached to Virtue's "Portraits of Eminent Conservatives," published in the middle of the nineteenth century, Mrs. Disraeli is said to have been descended

from an ancient Wiltshire family, the Vineys, and to be cousin of the Benetts of Pithouse, the Scropes of Castle Combe, and the Lamberts of Boyton. There were connections between these families, and there is no reason to doubt that they were in some way related to the Vineys. When Disraeli was Prime Minister, a letter was received from a member of the Scrope family relating to a claim to a dormant peerage, and he endorsed it: "Mr. Scrope was a relation of Lady Beaconsfield, and I am much interested in his case. His blood is the best in England."

Lady Beaconsfield's paternal grandfather died at Brampford Speke in March, 1807, and his wife six months afterwards. An entry in the Land Tax Assessment Roll of the county of Devon shows that the grandfather occupied at that time the farms of Sowdons and Moors, and one of these still bears the name of Sowdons. It does not seem clear whether Mr. Evans was the owner or the tenant of the property. His son John was born about the year 1760, and, like many other Devonshire lads, was attracted by the lure of the sea. It is not rash to conjecture that he ran away from home, as he was but eleven years old when he shipped on H.M.S. *Alarm* as captain's servant. He developed into a capable seaman,

Birth and Parentage

progressed through several grades to that of midshipman, and at the age of twenty-one passed an examination which qualified him for the rank of lieutenant. Had he not died soon after the outbreak of the war with France, he would probably have distinguished himself in the naval operations of "good King George's glorious days."

Lieutenant Evans had a friend in the service, Thomas Munn, and some time in the seventeenthies they made the acquaintance of two young ladies who were twin sisters, Eleanor and Bridget Viney, to whom they paid suit. The result was a double wedding at the parish church of Charles, Plymouth, on September 16th, 1788, Evans being married to Eleanor and Munn to Bridget. In a brief notice of the event, the *Exeter Flying Post* described the brides as "agreeable young ladies with handsome fortunes." They were twenty-three years of age and Evans about five years older. In the register he is described as "Lieutenant R.N., of this parish," and Munn as "Lieutenant in the Honourable East India service." Both the brides were spinsters, residing at the time in the parish of St. Andrew, Plymouth. The marriage was by licence, and there were for the two ceremonies nine witnesses. The fact that none of these bore the name

of Evans, Munn, or Viney gives some colour to the statement attributed by Lady Hobhouse to Lady Beaconsfield that it was a runaway match. In that case, there must have been a double elopement; but so far as Eleanor Viney is concerned the supposition is pretty clearly negatived by the fact that there was a formal "settlement," of which her friends were cognisant, executed before the ceremony. The trustees were Edmund Lambert, Esq., of Boyton, Wilts, and Ambrose Kent, D.D., of Berkley, Somerset. The bride's mother was a Boyton lady, probably related to the Lamberts; Dr. Ambrose Kent was rector of Berkley from 1770 to 1793.

The terms of the settlement show that the *Flying Post* was not without ground for the statement that the ladies had handsome fortunes. The Vineys had settled in the neighbourhood of Gloucester about the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the Willington Court Estate at Sandhurst was purchased by John Viney. They also acquired property at Little Taynton, which gave to its owners the dignity of Lord of the Manor. John Viney died in 1718, and was succeeded by his son William, one of whose sons, the Rev. James Viney, was the maternal grandfather of Lady Beaconsfield. Born in 1732, he was, when he married in 1758, vicar of Bishopstrow,



BRAMPFORD SPEKE, DEVON, HOME OF THE EVANS FAMILY UNTIL 1807

Birth and Parentage

Wiltshire, his wife being Sarah Powell, of Boyton. He died in 1767, leaving the twin sisters, another daughter, and one son, James, who became the most distinguished member of the family. The widow and her young children were well provided for, and when, a few years after her husband's death, she made a voluntary settlement of her property, Eleanor's share amounted to about £5,300. Richard Scrope, of Castle Combe, was one of the trustees of this settlement.

Eleanor's £5,300 was brought into settlement when she married Lieutenant Evans, and the deed further recited that "she hath great expectations of being possessed of considerable other fortune from her aunt, Mary Anne Viney, of the city of Gloucester, and otherwise." One may surmise that it was from this great-aunt that Lady Beaconsfield derived the Christian names by which she was known throughout her life, though, curiously enough, the name is given in the register of her baptism as Marianne. How far the "great expectations" were realised is not clear, but all the Vineys seem at this time to have been well-to-do, the family possessing property in the city of Gloucester, as well as in the county.

Lieutenant Evans brought nothing into the mar-

riage settlement, and there is no trace of any of his family having been associated with the marriage ceremonies. The young couple established a home in Exeter, and John pursued his naval career. He was promoted to a first-lieutenancy, and was commissioned in January, 1793, to H.M.S. *Ceres*. In the course of the year the *Ceres* went to join the squadron of Sir John Jervis in the West Indies, and from this voyage Lieutenant Evans never returned. There is no record of any casualty to him, and he probably succumbed to malaria, for there is at the Admiralty a note of the *Ceres* having been ordered to Bermuda to endeavour to recover her men from malignant fever. Whatever the cause, he died about the end of 1793, for letters of administration were granted to his widow on May 26th, 1794. The estate passed to her, and was sworn under £600.

Eleanor Evans, bereaved of her gallant young husband, continued to reside at Exeter until the end of the century, if not longer. As we have seen, the grandparents were still living at Brampford Speke, and there are indications that she was on good and intimate terms with them. She had three children—or possibly two only. Who were they, and what became of them? Though there is a sporting interest in the pursuit of elusive facts of this kind, it

Birth and Parentage

is usually sufficient for biographical purposes to state the result. The details in this case are, however, so curious that they may be given, at the risk of boring the reader.

Mr. Harris's researches led him to the conclusion that Eleanor Evans had three children, viz., Mary Anne, born in 1788; James, who died in infancy; and John Viney, a posthumous child, who entered the Army, and was, when he died in 1839, lieutenant-colonel commanding the 29th Worcester Regiment. There are in this record at least two capital errors. In the first place, Mary Anne was not the eldest child. The parents were married in September, 1788, and an entry in the parish register of Brampford Speke shows that their son James was born February 10th, 1790, baptised February 14th, and "received into the Church" March 14th. Mary Anne, as we shall see presently, was born in 1792. Of the death of James in infancy there is no documentary evidence, nor has any authentic record been found of the birth of a posthumous child. The statement that Lieut.-Colonel John Viney Evans (undoubtedly a brother of Mary Anne) was born in 1794 after the death of his father, is, however, plausible enough until we learn from the old Army Lists that he received his commission as ensign in the

29th Regiment of Foot in September, 1808. This brings the investigation to a halt, but the scent is found again when we discover the surprising fact that the young officer did not then bear the name of John. He entered the Army as James Evans, and the inference is irresistible that he was the child who was received into the Church at Brampford Speke in March, 1790, and would at the date of the commission be eighteen years of age. In the Army Lists, as time passed, the name underwent two changes. In 1814 it first appeared as James Viney Evans, and in 1820 the initial name was changed to John.

The explanation of these changes of nomenclature is not easy to conjecture, but they set up the presumption that Eleanor Evans had but two children, John and James being one and the same. As John Viney Evans the officer became major in 1827 and was promoted to be lieutenant-colonel in 1839, shortly before his death. His tombstone in Kensal Green Cemetery bears the inscription that it was "raised to the memory of Lieut.-Colonel John Viney Evans by his affectionate sister, Mary Anne Lewis," who was then on the eve of her marriage to Disraeli.

The record of Mary Anne's own birth, so long

Birth and Parentage

sought by biographers and compilers of works of reference, is contained in the parish register of St. Sidwell's, Exeter. It bears the date November 14th, 1792, and records the baptism of Marianne, daughter of John and Eleanor Evans, of that parish. Sir Stafford Northcote, first Earl of Iddesleigh (who was Lord of the Manor of Brampford Speke), said in a letter written in 1859 that Mrs. Disraeli told him she was born in that village. It is possible that, the father being at sea, Mrs. Evans was with his parents when her child was born, but doubtless Lady Hobhouse's recollection, that she said she lived for a time at Brampford Speke when a child, is the more trustworthy. The home of her grandparents cannot now be identified. The old farmhouse of Sowdons has been replaced by a plain brick dwelling.

From the foregoing facts it may with safety be affirmed, not only that Mary Anne Evans was born a lady, but that her mother, when left a widow, was in easy circumstances. She had a small fortune of her own, her relations in Gloucestershire were considered landed proprietors, her husband's parents were apparently well-to-do, and her son when he grew to manhood was sufficiently educated, and in a sufficiently good financial position to obtain a com-

Mary Anne Disraeli

mission in the Army. From the time when he and his sister were in their early 'teens, their mother's only brother was Lord of the Manors of Little Taynton and Sandhurst and head of the Viney family.

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VIAGRELL 311



III. EARLY YEARS AND FIRST MARRIAGE





IN the memoir prefixed to the collected edition of his father's works, Disraeli records that in his twenty-ninth year Isaac D'Israeli suffered from an illness, wrongly diagnosed as consumption, and was recommended to spend a time in Devonshire. From 1795 to about 1798 he lived in Exeter or the neighbourhood, most of the time with Mr. Baring, member of Parliament for the city. He little thought that there was then living in Exeter with her mother, or near by with her grandparents, a child who was ultimately to influence profoundly the career of his son, as yet unborn. The association of Mary Anne Evans with Brampford Speke doubtless came to an end with the death of her father's parents in 1807. She was then in her fifteenth year, and thereafter we find traces of her having lived with her uncle (afterwards Sir James Viney, K.C.H., C.B.) at Cathedral House, Gloucester. This house, nominally in College Green, really opens on the cathedral gardens, and is part of the capitular estate. Built about the year 1686, it is a substantial building, still in

Mary Anne Disraeli

good condition. With the tithes of Taynton, it was in the year 1701 leased by the Dean and Chapter to John Viney, and from that date until 1841 it was the residence of successive members of the Viney family. The vault containing their remains is scarcely a hundred yards from the front entrance, being recessed from the Lady Chapel in the cathedral. Mary Anne's uncle, then a captain in the Royal Artillery, became the lessee in 1800, but must have spent much of his time on active service abroad. He distinguished himself in the Peninsular War, and received the medal and clasp for Rolera, Vimiera, and Corunna, where he commanded the Royal Artillery. He was also awarded the Companionship of the Bath, and after the peace received a knighthood, becoming major-general in 1830. After his death in 1841, Cathedral House came into the hands of Mrs. Disraeli herself, not as heir of her uncle, but as joint executor under her first husband's will. The fortunes of the Vineys had by this time declined and Sir James had resorted to his niece's husband for money. Wyndham Lewis had mortgages on a large part of the estate, which included two other houses on College Green. Thus Mary Anne, very soon after her marriage to Disraeli, renewed a direct association with the place where she had passed some of her early

Early Years and First Marriage

years. It is said that when living there in her maidenhood she taught in a Sunday School founded for the benefit especially of girls employed in the pin factories at Gloucester.

Her mother had in the meantime taken a second husband, Thomas Yate. It has been stated that he was an Army surgeon, and lived in Park Street, Clifton. This, now one of the principal shopping streets of Bristol, was at that time a good residential quarter, convenient for the Hotwells Spa and the Downs. Mr. and Mrs. Yate may have lived in one of the boarding-houses there. But there is no evidence that Mr. Yate was a medical man, and he was certainly not an Army surgeon. A search of the records discloses no medical officer of that name in the British Army during the period 1785-1815. Nor is his name to be found in the local directories of that time as having lived at Bristol, Exeter, or Bath. There is reason to think he was a master of ceremonies somewhere, but he remains an obscure figure, and one gets the impression that he was not a very satisfactory person. There is authority for saying that nothing remains in the unpublished Beaconsfield papers which would show how or where he and Mary Anne's mother lived after their marriage. Being again widowed, Mrs. Yate spent her last years with her daugh-

ter, living long enough to be the mother-in-law of Disraeli. She possessed then £3,000, which was probably Viney money. While, therefore, it may be true that Mary Anne passed through some vicissitudes after the death of old Mr. and Mrs. Evans, in 1807, and may at some period have had to take employment, there is sufficient evidence that she was brought up respectably, and was in good circumstances when she made the acquaintance of Mr. Wyndham Lewis.

Clifton, as a resort of youth and fashion, had at the beginning of the nineteenth century lost some of the glamour it possessed when Fanny Burney's Evelina disported herself there, but the Spa at Hotwells was still a not inconsiderable rival of Bath, and whether Mary Anne Evans was residing at or visiting Bristol, she would naturally be attracted by its gaieties. She was a volatile young lady, and had personal charms which must have attracted admirers; but, like her mother, she remained single until her twenty-fourth year. In the year of Waterloo she met Mr. Wyndham Lewis, at a ball, given by the Vernon-Grahams, at Clifton. The hosts on this occasion appear to have been visitors at the Spa. General Vernon, of Hilton Park, Staffordshire, had in 1814 assumed the additional name of Graham,



WYNDHAM LEWIS, M.P.

From a portrait in possession of Mrs. Murray-Thriepland

Early Years and First Marriage

and as his mother was a Cardiff lady, Mr. Lewis was probably a friend of the family.

Wyndham Lewis was at this time thirty-five years of age, and it may be noted here that while Mary Anne's first husband was twelve years older than herself, her second was twelve years her junior. Mr. Lewis was a member of an old Glamorganshire family, whose wealth had grown with the development of the coalfields. In the middle of the eighteenth century they held the estates of Newhouse and Greenmeadow, both near Cardiff, the Rev. William Lewis owning the former and his brother the latter. Wyndham, born October 7th, 1780, was third son of the owner of Newhouse, and is commonly supposed to have inherited Greenmeadow from his uncle, who died without issue. It is doubtful, however, whether he was actually the owner of Greenmeadow. It passed to his elder brother Henry, who owned also the estate of Park, which had come into the family from their mother's side. Henry made his home at Park, and appears to have leased Greenmeadow to Wyndham. Mr. Harris says Wyndham subsequently came into possession of Pantgwynlais Castle. This also is an error, and a rather curious one. Wyndham partly rebuilt the house at Greenmeadow, and re-named it

Pantgwynlais, which may be taken as the Welsh equivalent of Greenmeadow. He was a magistrate and deputy lieutenant of Glamorgan, major in the Militia, and took a prominent part in the public life of Cardiff and the county. He also had a handsome house in London. He had been admitted at Lincoln's Inn in 1812, but he was not called to the Bar until 1819, and seems never to have practised as a lawyer.

Mr. Lewis used to go over to Bristol for the hunting in the Mendips, and it was probably on one of these occasions that he met Mary Anne, and lost his heart to her. It was a brilliant match for a daughter of John Evans, and a good one even for a Viney. Her uncle showed his approval by coming from Gloucester for the wedding, which took place at the parish church of Clifton on December 22nd, 1815. The marriage was by licence, both parties being described as of the parish of Clifton, and the witnesses were James Viney and A. Yates. The second witness was not of her stepfather's family, the signature being clearly Yates not Yate. There was no report of the event in the local Press, beyond the formal announcement in the *Bristol Mirror*, which read: "Friday, at Clifton, Wyndham Lewis, Esq., of Green Meadow, near Cardiff, to Mary Anne,

Early Years and First Marriage

only daughter of the late John Evans, Esq., of Brampford Speke, Devon."

Mrs. Lewis soon acquired popularity in Cardiff. She was regarded as a very bright and sprightly lady, and was much sought after at balls and other parties. The authorised biography of Disraeli is slightly in error in stating that at the time of his marriage Mr. Lewis was member for Cardiff. It was not until some years afterwards that he first offered himself as a candidate for the House of Commons, and from what we know of his wife's character, we may infer that it was from her that he received the inspiration. His opportunity came in 1820. The Marquess of Bute and the Stuart family then dominated the borough of Cardiff, which was represented in Parliament by Lord William Crichton-Stuart. At the General Election of 1820 Lord William for some reason stood aside. Wyndham Lewis was chosen as the Tory candidate, and Mary Anne had her first experience of electioneering. As Disraeli found later, she had in this capacity a potent influence, and she assisted Lewis to a notable triumph. He beat the Whig candidate, E. Ludlow, by 475 to 245 votes.

Mr. Lewis represented Cardiff in one Parliament only. In 1826 Lord William again wanted the seat,

and was returned unopposed. Lewis turned his attention to the little borough of Aldeburgh, in Suffolk, and was again successful. But Aldeburgh, which had been almost swallowed up by the sea, was one of the constituencies scheduled in the Reform Bill for extinction. On the passing of the Bill, therefore, Lewis had again to woo a fresh electorate, and now turned to Maidstone. The Kentish borough had for some years been represented by two Whigs. They stood again in 1832, and after a stubborn contest Mr. Lewis, who carried the Tory banner, was beaten by 48 on a poll of 1,400.

It was in this year that he made the acquaintance of young Disraeli, but there is no evidence that Disraeli took any part in the Maidstone contest; he was, indeed, busy with his own first electoral fight at Wycombe. Maidstone was a corrupt old town, terribly expensive to the candidates who sought its favour. Mr. A. W. Robarts, who represented the borough for seventeen years, before and after the Reform Act, told Charles Greville that the elections there were easily and simply conducted, as the electors thought of nothing except what they could get for their votes. When Lady Beaconsfield appealed to Sir Robert Peel, in 1841, to include Disraeli in his Ministry, she gave as one reason for con-

Early Years and First Marriage

sideration the assurance that more than £40,000 had been spent on elections at Maidstone by her influence alone. On another occasion, talking to Mr. T. E. Kebbel of the various electoral contests in which she had engaged on behalf of her husbands, she said the money spent on them was something like £100,000.

This fight at Maidstone in 1832 was the only one in which she failed. The Tories of the borough were, however, so well satisfied with Mr. Lewis's efforts on their behalf that in the April following his defeat a "great breakfast" was given to him in London, and he was presented with some "magnificent plate," as Disraeli, who attended the party, told his sister. The reverse was but temporary. Whether as the result of Lewis's increased popularity, or of the Conservative reaction, or of a more lavish expenditure of money, he headed the poll when he stood again in 1835, and retained the seat until his death.

It has been convenient to trace here in outline the political career of Mary Anne's first husband—undistinguished except for its associations—as it affords an index to her own activities during this period, and incidentally exposes the flimsiness of the "haberdasher" stories.



IV. FIRST ASSOCIATION WITH DISRAELI





WYNDHAM LEWIS'S town house was on one of the finest residential sites in London. It is now No. 29, Park Lane, at the corner of Upper Grosvenor Street, and immediately opposite to the Grosvenor Gate entrance to Hyde Park. When Lady Beaconsfield was in her last illness, and unable to travel to her beloved Hughenden, Disraeli wrote to his colleague Gathorne Hardy (Lord Cranbrook): "One has the advantage here when we wake of looking on trees and bowery vistas, and we try to forget that the park is called Hyde and the bowers are the bowers of Kensington." It was from the drawing-room of this house that Mrs. Lewis first saw the young Disraeli driving in the Park with a lady. Having returned from his long tour in the East, he was becoming a conspicuous figure in London Society. Mrs. Lewis resolved to make his acquaintance, and it was "by particular desire" that he was introduced to her shortly afterwards. The establishment of contact was not difficult. Mrs. Lewis was on familiar terms with Mrs. Edward Lytton Bulwer,

and Bulwer and Disraeli were close friends. The young men had much in common. Both had lofty aspirations, literary and political, and their genius had blossomed early. One with "Pelham," the other with "Vivian Grey," had taken the first steps on the ladder of fame. They were, moreover, both dandies of the first water, types of the exquisites of their period. The young men of fashion were, generally speaking, of an intellectual character superior to that of the Bucks and the Macaronis who had preceded them. In their composition and deportment there was more of the *bel-esprit*, less of the fop. But their sartorial affectations were not less pronounced.

Bulwer and Disraeli were well qualified to shine in a constellation of this kind. With his wife, Rosetta Wheeler—afterwards to become his tormentor and scourge—Bulwer had taken a fine house in Hertford Street, where they gave entertainments on a lavish scale. It was at one of these that Disraeli met his future wife. The company was usually an amalgam of Mayfair and Bohemia, and Disraeli, having in him something of both, was a welcome guest, and among the smartest. The Hon. Henry Coke recalls (in "Tracks of a Rolling Stone") how Lady Morgan, eminent in her day as an authoress,



GROSVENOR GATE
Lady Beaconsfield's London House

First Association with Disraeli

described to him the appearance of the author of "Vivian Grey" at one of these assemblies. In her piquant Irish brogue she said he "took the full shine of his janus. He was dressed in a black velvet jacket and suit to match, with a red sash round his waist, in which stuck a dagger with richly jewelled sheath and handle."

His appearance on another occasion was described to Frederick Greenwood (who wrote the Beaconsfield article in the "Encyclopædia Britannica") by Bulwer's brother Henry. He and some other rising young men were invited by Edward to meet his "amazingly brilliant" friend. They all had a good conceit of themselves, "yet if, on leaving the table, we had been secretly taken aside and asked who was the cleverest of the party, we should have been obliged to say it was the young man in the green velvet trousers." Disraeli, with his hair in ringlets, wore green velvet trousers, a canary-coloured waistcoat, low shoes with silver buckles, and lace at his wrists. According to Mr. Keibel (in the "D.N.B."), Disraeli was in later years annoyed by the stories told of the dandyism of his youth, and once wrote to an evening paper that he never wore green trousers in his life.

Be this as it may, the young man so gracefully

depicted in Maclise's drawing of "the author of 'Vivian Grey'" would not be the least striking of the guests when Mrs. Lewis met him at the house of the Bulwers on April 28th, 1832. His own account of the meeting has been familiar since his letters to his sister were published by Ralph Disraeli in 1885. It was, he said, a brilliant soirée. "There were many dames of distinction, and no blues." An exception was the accomplished and unfortunate "L.E.L.," whom he had avoided at a previous party because she "looked the very personification of Brompton—pink satin dress and white satin shoes, red cheeks, snub nose, and her hair *à la* Sappho." Now, however, she had "thrown off Græco-Bromptonian costume, was perfectly *à la Française*, and looked really pretty."

One wonders if there was an even more rapid change of opinion about Mrs. Lewis. According to a story which has been accepted by some of the biographers of Disraeli, Mrs. Bulwer came up to him in the drawing-room and asked him to take Mrs. Lewis down to dinner. "Oh!" was the reply, "anything but that insufferable woman; but Allah is great!" This may or may not be true; there is no suggestion of it in the letter to Sarah. After his reference to "L.E.L.," he said: "I was intro-

First Association with Disraeli

duced, by particular desire, to Mrs. Wyndham Lewis, a pretty little woman, a flirt and a rattle; indeed, gifted with a volubility I should think unequalled, and of which I can convey no idea. She told me she liked silent, melancholy men. I answered that I had no doubt of it." The suggestion seems to be that he quite believed she would take to men who would let her do the talking.

Mrs. Lewis was at this time in her fortieth year, he in his twenty-eighth; but the discrepancy was probably less apparent than real. More than ten years afterwards, when Henry Hope entertained the Disraelis to meet the Young England party at Deepdene, the chief impression left on the mind of Hope's son was that she was "remarkably girlish in manner"; and she retained until late in life a vivacious juvenility and gaiety—which, it is true, was sometimes artificial and even grotesque. After her death the Duchess of Cleveland told Disraeli how one of her sons (probably the Earl of Rosebery, her stepson) once spoke to Lady Beaconsfield in wonder of the youthful energy and high spirits she preserved, and said something of the courage and high character it showed. "No," she replied, "it is not that. It is that my life has been such a happy one. I have

had so much affection, and no troubles—no contradictions; and that is what has kept me so young and well.”

Two early portraits of her are preserved at Hughenden—a miniature painted by Rochard in 1829, and a water-colour by A. E. Chalon, R.A., 1840. The latter is the more engaging, and perhaps more flattering. The miniature shows the nose sharper and the chin less gracefully moulded. In both the hair is a mass of ringlets, and in the miniature she wears a necklet of large pearls. In this connection a curious point may be mentioned. In “Lothair,” Mr. Ruby, speaking of pearls as “treacherous property,” says: “They require great care; they want both fresh air and exercise; they must be worn frequently. . . . I go down to Havant Castle every year to see her Grace’s pearls, and I wipe every one of them myself, and let them lie on a sunny bank in the garden, in a westerly wind, for hours and days together. Their complexion would have been ruined but for this treatment.” Mr. Buckle says that Disraeli himself followed the advice he put into the mouth of the Bond Street jeweller. At Hughenden on sunny days he would bring out his wife’s pearls for an airing, and lay them carefully on the grass of the terrace. There is also at Hughenden a por-

First Association with Disraeli

trait of Lady Beaconsfield painted after her death. To this reference will be made later.

The portrait by Chalon was reproduced in Heath's "Book of Beauty" (1841) with the following lines by the Right Hon. George Dawson, whose wife was a sister of Sir Robert Peel, and for many years a friend of Mrs. Lewis:

The choice unfettered fondly turns to thee:
Still to thee turns, all confident to find
The features but the index to the mind,
Glowing with truth, sincerity, and ease,
Stamped with the surest attributes to please,
Intelligent and gay, the joyous smile
Speaking a bosom free from art or guile,
Pure as the consciousness of well-spent life,
Perfect as friend, as daughter, sister, wife.

No high degree of loveliness was needed to qualify for inclusion in the Books of Beauty popular in those days; but Disraeli was never very susceptible to female loveliness. It might be said of him, as it was said of Pitt in the "Rolliad," that he was "pretty-girlibus indifferentissimus." Lord Esher observes, in "Cloud Capp'd Towers," that, like so many men of vivid imagination, he loved women without passion. There was certainly plenty of passion in

his expressions of love, but it is true, no doubt, that he was curiously lacking in visual sense of beauty—although the gorgeous appealed to his Oriental imagination—and that it was not physical charm that attracted him to his wife. Nevertheless, the portraits indicate that there was sufficient justification for Disraeli's description of her as a pretty little woman when he met her in 1832. That she was a flirt may be doubted, but she was certainly a "rattle." She retained throughout her life the characteristic on which he laid so much emphasis, and of the various descriptions given of her, few fail to notice the volume and freedom of her conversation.

Disraeli, who was at this time living in bachelor quarters in Duke Street, became a frequent visitor at Grosvenor Gate, where he met Prince Lucien Buonaparte and other notable people. That he was contemplating marriage, and getting a fortune with a wife, is shown by the letters to his sister and others, and there was probably some foundation for the hint thrown out in a letter he wrote to Mrs. Lewis when they had their one serious quarrel, that had money been his only object, he might have chosen from the susceptible young ladies of the society in which he moved one who would have brought him wealth enough to relieve him from his financial embarrass-

First Association with Disraeli

ments. His father was pressing upon him the desirability of a suitable marriage, and it was probably about this time, or soon afterwards, that Bulwer expressed the same opinion in a remarkable "Judex," or geomantic divination, which the Earl of Lytton found among his father's papers. Disraeli stated in 1837 that all London was "mad with animal magnetism, a sort of spiritualism or geomancy," and Bulwer was infected with the craze. The *Judex* is dated 1860, but is signed "E.L.B.," and Bulwer changed his name from Lytton Bulwer to Bulwer-Lytton on the death of his mother in the early 'forties. Moreover, it is evident that Disraeli was unmarried when a portion at least of the forecast was written, for the seer, prophesying for him a great career, began: "A singularly fortunate figure: a strongly-marked influence towards the acquisition of coveted objects. He would gain largely by marriage in the pecuniary sense, which makes a crisis in his life. He would have a peaceful hearth, to his own taste, and leaving him free for ambitious projects."

It was with these objects in view that Disraeli was contemplating marriage, but there is no ground for supposing that his relations with Mrs. Lewis were already affected by the feelings of overwhelming devotion which he was expressing a few years after-

wards, or that she, while her husband lived, entertained for him any sentiment more tender than admiration. Of his future greatness she had a profound conviction, and she followed with sympathetic interest—if with no more substantial aid—the efforts he now made to obtain a seat in the House of Commons. Twice in the year 1832 he contested without success the borough of Wycombe—first at a casual vacancy occurring while the Reform Bill was still before Parliament, when Colonel Grey, son of the Prime Minister, defeated him by twenty-six votes to eleven, and again under the extended franchise; and he fought two more losing battles in 1835—first at Wycombe at the General Election, and then at Taunton, in opposition to a member who had vacated his seat on taking office under Peel. Two years later, when Parliament was again dissolved on the demise of the Crown, Maidstone gave him the long-sought honour. Mr. Robarts, the old Whig member, tired, as he told Charles Greville, of paying heavily for votes, did not stand, and the contest was between Lewis and Disraeli, Conservatives, and Colonel Peronet Thompson, the Radical editor of the *Westminster Review*, who afterwards sat for Hull and Bradford. The fight was keen and bitter. Of the re-election of Lewis there was never a doubt; the



BENJAMIN DISRAELI IN 1835
From a sketch by Count D'Orsay

First Association with Disraeli

issue lay between Disraeli and Thompson. A second Liberal, Erskine Perry, was nominated, but retired early. Mrs. Lewis threw herself into the fray with her customary ardour, and in a letter to her brother, after prophesying that Disraeli would be one of the greatest men of the day, said jubilantly, "They call him my political protégé." Lewis headed the poll, and Disraeli received 668 votes against Thompson's 559.

Much bad blood was created, and there was without doubt an orgy of bribery. No petition followed, but when Lewis died in the following year, and Roberts stood again and was defeated by John M. Fector, a petition was presented, and in the inquiry much corruption was disclosed at this and previous contests. Disraeli was accused of having made corrupt promises to the electors which he did not fulfil, and this led to a violent controversy—almost to a duel with one of the lawyers. Disraeli told the Committee that the whole of the election expenses were paid by Lewis, and this can well be believed, but we may accept with some qualification the further statement that he refunded his moiety to Lewis. More probably he acknowledged it as a debt, for he had at this time other financial obligations of a decidedly more pressing kind. On going to Maidstone for

Mary Anne Disraeli

the election, he wrote to Mr. Pyne, his solicitor, asking him to take precautions against any writs being sent there during the election, and adding, with his usual facetious insouciance in money matters: "I was glad to find the Sheriff's officer here among my staunch supporters: I suppose gratitude."



V. A BRIEF WIDOWHOOD





UP to the time of his election to the House of Commons, the association of the Lewises with Disraeli had been that of acquaintanceship and mutual interest; it now ripened into a warm friendship. On returning to his father's house at Bradenham immediately after the election, Disraeli wrote to Mrs. Lewis giving her an account of his reception at Wycombe, and adding that all at Bradenham wished very much that she and "Mr. Wyndham" would pay them a visit "among our beechen groves." The invitation was accepted, but in the meantime Disraeli went to London, and in a letter to his sister made an observation which gives a hazy view of the character of Mary Anne's first husband. He dined with the Lewises at Grosvenor Gate—a small party, including the Earl and Countess of Clarendon, Prince and Princess Poniatowsky (of the illustrious Polish family), Mrs. Catherine Gore (wit and author, whose prolific literary output is almost all passed into oblivion), Mrs. George Dawson, and half a dozen others. It was, said Disraeli, "a fine

dinner well cooked, and gorgeous service." Mr. and Mrs. Lewis were "very friendly, more friendly every day," and Wyndham he described as "certainly one of the oddest men that ever lived; but I like him very much." What form that oddity took is not suggested, but apparently it was not disagreeable, and this is the only suggestion I have seen that he was other than a quite ordinary gentleman. It has been said that he lived unhappily with his wife, but of this there is no evidence, and certainly his testamentary dispositions showed no lack of affection and confidence.

The visit to Bradenham was paid in August, and Mrs. Lewis was delighted with the family and the entourage she found there. Her political protégé had now become "our political pet, commonly called Dizzy," and his father was "the most lovable, perfect old gentleman I ever met with—a sort of modern Dominie Sampson, and his manners are so high-bred and natural!" The satisfaction was mutual, and it is testimony to the lady's estimable qualities that when the old gentleman died ten years afterwards he left his collection of prints to his "much loved daughter-in-law." When the Lewises were gone, Disraeli wrote her that the visit was too short, that everybody and everything were now dull and triste,

A Brief Widowhood

and all united in "love and affection and compliments to you and Wyndham." After Christmas Mrs. Lewis paid a second visit to Bradenham, and again her bright spirit scintillated in the drab family circle. "We miss you here all very much," he said. "Everything seems flat and everybody dull and dispirited, almost as dull and dispirited as you think me." Had she again rallied him as a silent melancholy man? The friendship with Lewis was still ripening. In December, after making the famous maiden speech in the House of Commons, Disraeli with his colleague had attended a banquet and public meeting at Maidstone, and he again noticed the growing effusiveness of Mr. Lewis, who was "infinitely more warm than ever."

Returning to London in January, 1838, for the meeting of Parliament, Disraeli once more found pleasure in the company of Mary Anne. Towards the end of the month he went with her and Mr. and Mrs. Horace Twiss to see Kean, Lord Chesterfield lending his box. Kean he thought mediocre, but he found compensation in the agreeable company. They had "a capital fire (the weather being severe), our own tea, and really very amusing." Wyndham was probably too unwell to accompany his wife. Though only fifty-eight years old, his health had been for

some time failing. That he was not expected to live long is suggested by the advice given after the Maidstone election to Disraeli by Count d'Orsay, with whom he had long been on intimate terms: "You will not make love, you will not intrigue; you have your seat, do not risk anything. If a widow, then marry." It is the kind of advice that would have been given by d'Orsay, but his friend stood in no need of it. Sir William Fraser, who tells the story, is clearly right in his judgment that Disraeli would not have been such a fool as to jeopardise for the sake of the lady's charms what he valued a hundred times more. Throughout his life he appreciated the wisdom of the maxim "*Evitez le crampon*," and though abnormally sensitive to feminine influence, his relations with women were never other than scrupulously honourable.

Wyndham Lewis's death occurred suddenly on March 15th, 1838, at the Grosvenor Gate house, his wife being with him at the time. She received many letters of condolence, and one cannot refrain from recalling a peculiar one sent by the egregious wife of Lytton Bulwer. When she introduced Mrs. Lewis to Disraeli at the Hertford Street party in 1832, Rosina was, he told his sister, "a blaze of jewels, and looked like Juno; only instead of a

A Brief Widowhood

peacock she had a dog in her lap, called Fairy, not bigger than a bird of paradise, and quite as brilliant." It was a Blenheim spaniel, which Bulwer had given her on their wedding, and she seldom allowed it out of her sight. She had visiting cards printed for Fairy, and left them on her friends when she called. The dog died about the same time as Mr. Lewis, and in her letter of sympathy to the widow (as her son relates) she compared their respective losses, lamenting her own as being in the nature of things the heaviest and most irreparable.

By his will, Wyndham Lewis left to his widow a life interest in the whole of his real and personal estate, without any condition as to re-marriage or other restriction, and made her joint executor with his brother, the Rev. William Price Lewis. The estate consisted in part of property in Gloucestershire which had belonged to her mother's family. Sir James Viney's financial condition seems to have deteriorated some time before this. He had sold the Sandhurst estate in 1829, and had mortgaged Taynton Manor to Wyndham Lewis, this estate including several farms—in all 336 acres. The mortgage came into the trust on Mr. Lewis's death, and after Mary Anne's marriage with Disraeli the mortgage was foreclosed and the estate sold to Mr. Laslett, M.P.,

Mary Anne Disraeli

for £13,000. The trust estate held by Mrs. Lewis for life also included the lease of Cathedral House and other property in Gloucester, of which she received the rents. Altogether her life interest produced an income of £4,000 or £5,000 per annum. The will provided that on her death the whole should pass to the Rev. William Price Lewis and his heirs. Although it is untrue, as sometimes stated, that the Gloucestershire property was given by Mrs. Lewis to Disraeli—this obviously could not be done—and sold by him, he acted for his wife in dealing with it, and in 1843 was joined with the executors in a renewal of the lease of Cathedral House from the Dean and Chapter. Another proof of his substantial interest in the county is the fact that his signature appeared in 1849 on a requisition from the owners and occupiers of property in Gloucestershire, asking the High Sheriff to call a meeting to consider the depressed state of the agricultural industry.

Besides the life interest in the Lewis property, Mary Anne had some funds of her own, derived from her mother's family. Mrs. Yate died at Grosvenor Gate in 1842, leaving the whole of her estate, valued at £3,000, to her only surviving child. Sir James Viney, also, who died in 1841, bequeathed £1,000 each to Mary Anne and other nieces, and,

A Brief Widowhood

subject to other legacies and specific bequests, the residue of his property to his sons, "or reputed sons," William and James Viney, and his nephew, John Viney Evans, who, as already noted, predeceased him.

By marrying the widow, therefore, Disraeli would be assured of a good income and a town house admirably adapted to his requirements, and would also have, in being or in prospect, some capital resources. These were of uncertain quantity, but probably meagre, even when, a few years later, she inherited from her uncle and her mother. Indeed, the lady's fortune proved to be smaller than was commonly expected, and seeing that she was considerably older than himself, Disraeli could not have failed to perceive that the income and the house placed at his disposal would be a precarious support for him. Nevertheless, he speedily resolved to pay suit to the widow, and despite his subsequent avowal that her fortune first attracted him, it is certain that his feeling for her developed ere long into one of genuine affection. His women friends, who were a dominating factor in his career, were usually older than himself—so much so that a Russian Ambassador once said that the society he kept was "*toutes grand-mères*."

It is not necessary to tell here in detail the story of his wooing. The official biography quotes copiously from his letters, and extremely interesting they are. Not many of Mary Anne's communications to him are reproduced, and there are few others remaining which would throw much light on her character and career. She had more facility with the tongue than with the pen; moreover, her husband was less careful than she in preserving letters. He found after her death that she seemed to have treasured in safe keeping, and unknown to him, every scrap of writing she ever received from him, before or after their marriage.

We see in the published letters how, the lady once free, Disraeli advanced by rapid steps from the professions of regard he had addressed to her when the wife of his colleague. He went to Maidstone a few days after Lewis's death, to transact some business arising out of the Parliamentary vacancy thus created. A hasty note to Mrs. Lewis, announcing his departure concluded: "God bless you, dear friend." Three weeks later, from Bradenham: "All send their love to you from this roof. Yours, D." After other three weeks, on April 27th: "And now God bless you, and believe me your affectionate friend, D." On May 5th, from the Carlton Club:

A Brief Widowhood

"Pray come to town cheerful and happy, and believe in a happy and brilliant future, like your affectionate D." On July 26th, from Rochester, when on the way to Maidstone: "I send you this scrawl from a wretched pothouse, to tell you that you have not been the whole day a moment absent from my thoughts." There could be no mistake on either side of the significance of these expressions, and if there was any doubt of Disraeli's intentions they were dispelled during a long visit which Mrs. Lewis paid to Bradenham in the autumn. On her departure early in October, he wrote to her almost daily in terms of rapturous devotion. He was at work then on the composition of his poetic tragedy, "Alarcos," and, remembering her parting injunctions (she was already, it seems, qualifying for the part of critic he ascribed to her in the dedication of "Sybil"), he "poured all his spirit into the tragedy." The fictitious scenes represented his actual sensations, "the pages teem with passages which you will not read without emotion, for they come from my heart, and they commemorate my love, my doubt, my misery. Your name is ever before me" (it was written in large characters and placed on his desk), "the name of her who is my inspiration, my life, perhaps my despair."

There was, indeed, a real doubt about her response to his advances. She had other admirers, and hinted at this when telling him of her doings in town. As the year drew to a close, doubts and fears alternated with hope and confidence. He expressed deep mortification at her strange and prolonged silence, and suggested that perhaps he had been labouring under a miserable illusion in supposing that his fate was bound up with hers.

D'Orsay had been to see him, and was "the best and kindest of men," but "what are friends, and what is all the goodness and kindness in the world, if there is a cloud between you and the being that you adore?" The next day (Sunday) he has heard that she is coming to see him, and writes with apparently superfluous ardour: "I am mad with love. My passion is frenzy. The prospect of our immediate meeting overwhelms and entrances me. I pass my nights and days in scenes of strange and fascinating rapture. Lose not a moment in coming. I cannot wait."

Whether she went then to Bradenham or not does not appear, but evidently his suit was not received with a fervency corresponding to his own. He either knew or divined that some of her friends were endeavouring to dissuade her from giving her hand and fortune to one whom they regarded as an upstart

A Brief Widowhood

adventurer, not merely penniless but heavily in debt, who for the sake of her money was willing to ally himself to a woman much older than himself. She had declined to enter into any formal engagement, at least until the lapse of a year from her husband's death—a year in which she could study his character. In those circumstances, he exaggerated the significance of silence or apparent coolness, for probably there was never any hesitation in her own mind as to her ultimate decision. Mr. Monypenny suggests that in her manifestations of coyness “she was perhaps not unmindful of those elusive feminine arts by which the impetuous lover is at once baffled and fascinated.” Perhaps so, but he on his side may not have been unmindful of the effect of a threatened breach upon a lady who ventures upon arts of this kind. Whatever his motive, Disraeli, who never did things by half, gave her a drubbing of great severity in one of the most remarkable letters to be found in the authorised biography.

He had gone up to London at the end of January, 1839, and on February 7th there was a stormy interview at Grosvenor Gate. It ended, according to his account, in her bidding him quit her house for ever, though this she denied. No summary of the letter he wrote to her the same night will do justice

Mary Anne Disraeli

to it, but some points may be mentioned here as showing the circumstances in which Disraeli resolved on making Mary Anne his wife. He admitted that at first he was prompted by no romantic feeling, and was not blind to the worldly advantage of an alliance with her, though he had already proved that his heart was not to be purchased—an allusion, doubtless, to other matrimonial possibilities. But he found her, as he thought, “amiable, tender, and yet acute, and gifted with no ordinary mind,” one on whom he could look with pride as the partner of his life. As to her fortune, that proved to be less than he or the world imagined. “It was, in fact, as far as I was concerned, a fortune which could not benefit me in the slightest degree; it was merely a jointure not greater than your station required, enough to maintain your establishment and gratify your private tastes.” Yet she had not hesitated to reproach him with interested views. He would not condescend to be the minion of a princess, and not all the gold of Ophir should ever lead him to the altar. Far different were the qualities he required in the sweet participant of his existence. “My nature demands that my life should be perpetual love.” By her conduct she had done what his enemies had failed to do—she had broken his spirit. In a few

A Brief Widowhood

days (presumably when it became known that she had thrown him over) he would be the scoff and jest of the world. Finally, and bitterly, he bade her farewell. "I will not affect to wish you happiness, for it is not in your nature to obtain it. For a few years you may flutter in some frivolous circle. But the time will come when you will sigh for any heart that could be fond, and despair of one that can be faithful. Then will be the penal hour of retribution: then you will think of me with remorse, admiration, and despair; then you will recall to your memory the passionate heart that you have forfeited, and the genius you have betrayed."

How far this outburst of passionate resentment and relinquishment was affectation, and how far the outcome of a real belief that his suit was at an end, one can but conjecture. It is, however, apparent from Mary Anne's response that the impression he professed to have received at the interview was a great exaggeration of anything she had intended to convey. But evidently he saw reason to apprehend a rupture, and if the action he took was designed to bring the lady to heel, it met with immediate success. The shock she received found expression in these terms:

"For God's sake come to me. I am ill and almost

Mary Anne Disraeli

distracted. I will answer all you wish. I never desired you to leave the house, or implied or thought a word about money. I received a most distressing letter, and you left me at the moment not knowing. . . . I have not been a widow a year. I often feel the apparent impropriety of my present position. . . . I am devoted to you."

When the lady gave her actual assent is uncertain. From an observation in Disraeli's letter of reproach it would appear that at this time they were regarded by their friends as practically, if not formally, engaged, but an anecdote related by Lady Battersea in her "Reminiscences" suggests the inference that the announcement when it came took Society by surprise. She states that before his marriage Disraeli frequently dined at the house of her grandmother, Mrs. Montefiore, in Great Stanhope Street, and at one of these dinner parties Mrs. Wyndham Lewis was also a guest. "Their engagement had not yet been announced, and my mother and her sister were quick to remark the little intimate nods and smiles interchanged by the two friends sitting on opposite sides of the table, and the way they drank to one another's health as they raised their wine glasses to their lips. To these young girls Mr. Disraeli had been a joyous, fantastic, captivating acquaintance, whilst to them

A Brief Widowhood

Mrs. Wyndham Lewis looked and seemed very much older than the man to whom she was about to give the unquestioning devotion of her life; quite elderly, in fact, and quite unfit for the post she was about to fill. They thought they were merely witnessing an amusing flirtation. When they were told of the engagement on the morrow their surprise was boundless. Can we not hear them saying, 'What! That old woman and our brilliant friend? Impossible!'" But perhaps the elders were less surprised than the young ladies.

Of the courtship no more need be said—all seems to have gone smoothly after this clearing of the air—but reference may be made to some hoary traditions which have been associated with it. They relate to visits Disraeli is supposed to have made to Wales to pay court to the widow, and they obtained so much currency that a chair at the Cow and Snuffers Inn, on the road to Greenmeadow, became known as Disraeli's chair. It was said that he used to stay (or call) there when visiting Mrs. Lewis, and this was his favourite seat. It is told how, when she saw Disraeli walking up the drive at Greenmeadow, the widow said to her maid, "Gracious, Jane, there's that horrid man coming; go down and tell him I am not at home," and how when Jane did so he coolly told

her to take his bag to a bedroom; how, when he persisted in his attentions, the maid told Mrs. Lewis the best thing she could do was to marry him; and so forth. It happens that Mrs. Lewis's maid was not named Jane, but Nina Rook, and of these stories it is sufficient further to observe that when, years afterwards, Mr. Disraeli went to Cardiff and stayed at the old Cardiff Arms Hotel, he said he had never been in the town before, or seen Greenmeadow.

Nor is it at all likely that Mrs. Lewis spent much of her widowhood in the neighbourhood of Cardiff. She was away from London shortly after her husband's death, and probably she had gone to Wales to make arrangements with her fellow-executor in connection with her succession to the property. It was not an agreeable business. Her complaints on the subject to Disraeli are echoed, or reflected, in his answers. She had experienced not only heavy trials, but petty vexations; but he counselled her to command her temper and watch over her interests, and not to hurry her return to London. She stayed only a few weeks, and was back in town for the Coronation on June 20th. She could not, being in mourning, take part in the festivities, but Disraeli was at the Abbey, and gave to her the gold medal he received as a member of Parliament. From her house

A Brief Widowhood

he and others saw the review in Hyde Park on July 20th, but no one except Lord Rolle and himself was allowed to be on the drawing-room floor, lest there should be the appearance of a party.

At the time of the quarrel in February, 1839, Disraeli was rapidly making his way as a political figure, and his Parliamentary activities during the summer were interspersed with the diversions of Society, in which Mrs. Lewis also now began to participate. They were often together, and at one of the parties they attended they had an adventure which had an amusing sequel nearly twenty years afterwards. Being invited by Bulwer to breakfast at Craven Cottage, his house on the Thames (described in "Ernest Maltravers," and also mentioned in "Tancred"), they arrived late, as did Prince Louis Napoleon and his gallant henchman, the Comte de Persigny, then also a refugee in London. The other guests having gone up the river, the four decided to follow in a boat. The Prince took the oars, and managed to run them on a mudbank in the middle of the river. There was some danger from the swell caused by passing steamboats, and Mrs. Lewis scolded the Prince for his clumsiness. She told him he was always too adventurous, and should not undertake things he could not accomplish. These were rather

Mary Anne Disraeli

malappropriate reproaches to cast on the man who had twice got into trouble for designs on the throne of Louis Philippe, and was then probably contemplating the attempt abortively made at Boulogne in the following year. But the Prince took the lady's rebukes good-naturedly, and the boat was got off without mishap. In 1856, when the Prince had become Emperor and Disraeli a Cabinet Minister, Mrs. Disraeli sat between the Emperor and the Empress at a banquet at the Tuilleries and reminded Napoleon of the adventure. Eugénie's comment on the story was: "Just like him!"

The wedding was fixed to take place immediately after the prorogation of Parliament. In one of his last letters as a lover, Disraeli shows how joyfully he anticipated the consummation of his hopes. "I look forward to the day of our union," he said, "as that epoch in my life which will seal my career; for whatever occurs afterwards will, I am sure, never shake my soul, as I shall always have the refuge of your sweet heart in sorrow or disappointment, and your quick and accurate sense to guide me in prosperity and triumph."



VI. THE PERFECT WIFE





NO record is to be found of Disraeli having ever recognised his wife's birthday. The sacred anniversary with both was that of their wedding, and it was his custom every year to address her on that day in verse. It was the 28th of August, and the ceremony took place quietly at St. George's, Hanover Square, the bride being described as of Grosvenor Gate and of Pantgwynlais, Glamorganshire. She was nearing the completion of her forty-sixth year, he of his thirty-fourth.

The honeymoon began at Tunbridge Wells, where they stayed at the Kentish Hotel. Writing to his sister on September 4th, Disraeli said the rooms were very agreeable, and this was fortunate, as the rain was unceasing, and they had scarcely left the hotel, except to take a drive amid squalls and another amid showers. The weather clearing, they left two days later, driving with their own horses to Ashford, where they stayed the night at an inn. Next day they drove through Hythe to Dover, slept at the Ship Hotel, and then crossed to Calais. The pas-

Mary Anne Disraeli

sage, though it took nearly two and a half hours, was considered to be very rapid. But it was not a pleasant passage for Mary Anne, who "suffered dreadfully"; indeed, Disraeli (with the self-satisfaction usual in these circumstances) declared that all the passengers except himself suffered from sea-sickness.

Continuing their journey, still in their own carriage, through Dunkirk and Ostend, the travellers reached Brussels in the evening of the 8th. Tired and hungry, they had a long search for accommodation, the hotels being full. At length they got lodged in an entresol at the "Britannique"—"grateful for even this wretched shelter." From Brussels they drove through Liège to Antwerp, going thence by Aix la Chapelle and Cologne to Baden Baden, where they arrived on the 19th. They did the latter part of the journey on a river steamer, sleeping comfortably in their own carriage. "Such," wrote Disraeli to his sister, "are the revolutions of modern travel!"

Mrs. Disraeli thought Baden not much better than Cheltenham—public dinners, balls, promenades, pumps, music, and gambling—and they did not stay long. Driving through the Black Forest to Munich, they remained in that city during the greater part of October. After visiting some other German cities.

The Perfect Wife

they went down the Rhine from Bingen to Coblenz, and from there to Paris. For several weeks they spent a gay time in the French capital, meeting many friends, who were very kind to them. The bride was "particularly well, and in her new costumes looking like Madame de Pompadour, who is at present the model of Paris—at least in dress," the scrupulous husband added. The honeymoon ended early in December, when they were back at Grosvenor Gate, and Disraeli had for the first time a home he could call his own.

Henceforward the life of Mary Anne was merged in that of her husband; yet it stands out in the records with a marked individuality. She fulfilled to the brim his expectation that she would be a solace and support in times of trial and disappointment, and he for his part was careful that she should share the fruits of his political and social triumphs. "I shall not be tempted anywhere without you," he said once when, being in town alone, he had been invited to dine with the Duke and Duchess of Parma. Of another invitation, from the Baroness Brunnow, wife of the Russian Ambassador, he said: "I don't particularly want to go, but very much wish you should, and maintain your position in Society." Experience justified also his confidence in her "quick and accu-

rate sense," and though she used to say she knew nothing of politics, he was certainly in the habit of taking her into his counsel when doubtful of his attitude to public men and affairs. In the winter of 1848-9, for example, when the question of the Conservative leadership in the House of Commons hung in the balance, and he was much harassed by the complications that beset him, he wrote to her from town: "Deciding on nothing. I shall have the benefit of your advice, which I have several times wanted." Sir William Fraser records that in 1853 Disraeli suggested to him the possibility of an alliance with Cobden and Bright, and three weeks later Mrs. Disraeli asked him privately what he would think of such a combination. It is true that there was a project of the kind mooted. The suggestion was made by John Bright after the election of 1852 had sounded the knell of the Derby Government, in which Disraeli was Chancellor of the Exchequer. At his invitation, Bright went to Grosvenor Gate to discuss the matter. Bright's idea was that Disraeli might get rid of the "old-stagers and red-tapists," and form a Government with Cobden and himself. Nothing came of the suggestion, but the fact that Disraeli and his wife separately asked Sir William Fraser what he thought of it shows that they con-

The Perfect Wife

sidered together the advantages and disadvantages of conceivable political tactics.

In his literary work also he found her counsel of some value. His tribute to her in the famous dedication of "Sybil" must again be quoted: "I would inscribe this work to one whose noble spirit and gentle nature ever prompt her to sympathise with the suffering; to one whose sweet voice has often encouraged, and whose taste and judgment have ever guided its pages, the most severe of critics, but—a perfect wife." We can estimate now at its true value a cynical attack made upon the lady when "Sybil" was published. A writer in *Fraser's Magazine* of June, 1845, reviewed the book in the bludgeoning style which was then dying out. Taking hold of the phrase "most severe of critics," he said she was evidently a shrew, and advised her husband to conquer her disposition to find fault, "when the chances are that the worthy couple will live more comfortably together."

The dedication was written five years after their marriage, and though the eulogy may be taken with the grain of qualification usually to be associated with dedications, many indications are to be found of the intelligent interest Mary Anne took in his literary labours. She preserved a number of notes he sent to

Mary Anne Disraeli

her during the writing of "Coningsby" and "Sybil," which show that he sometimes took her advice. He appears to have felt the lack of her counsel when writing "Endymion" some years after her death. Sending a copy of the work to Lady de Rothschild, he begged her to convey to him some of her impressions on reading it, "not only because I have confidence in your intelligence and always-welcome criticism, but because this is the first work which I ever published without the preliminary advantage of a female counsellor, an advantage which I know from experience is inestimable." On this it may be observed that before his marriage he had taken the advice of Lady Blessington, Mrs. Austin, and other ladies. Shortly before his marriage, thanking Lady Blessington for a copy of her "Desultory Thoughts and Reflections," he said he had given it to Mrs. Lewis, who was a great admirer of aphoristic writing. She was to mark what she approved, and he found the volume lying on her table with scarcely a margin not deeply scored.

A letter published in the "Life of Lord Houghton" shows that Disraeli was not paying his wife an empty compliment when he eulogised her as a literary critic. When "Coningsby" was published in the spring of 1844, a discriminating review of the

The Perfect Wife

book was written for *Hood's Magazine* by Lord Houghton, then Mr. Monckton Milnes. Disraeli wrote to him shortly afterwards regretting he had not seen the review when Milnes called at Grosvenor Gate, for if he had, "we could have discussed together the points of controversy, assisted by Mrs. Disraeli, who has several puissant arguments for you in store, though she, as well as myself, appreciate comments that at the same time indicate the thoughtful mind, the cultivated taste, and the refined pen."

Childless herself, Mrs. Disraeli looked upon her husband's books as his and her children. In a well-known anecdote, she is said to have referred to the room where he was brought to bed of "Coningsby," and in a letter of January, 1847, she told Lady de Rothschild: "The first proofs of 'Tancred' are now on the table. How much I hope you may be here when he is presented to the public, for I am sure you will sympathise with me in my child's fate." Testimony of this kind to her capacity to appreciate her husband's literary work seems more trustworthy than the report of a flippant reference to her which Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff entered in his diary. According to this report, Disraeli said of her after her death: "She was a bright creature; she lived

Mary Anne Disraeli

wholly in the present. She thought nothing of the future; she cared nothing for the past. I discovered that she did not know whether the Greeks or the Romans came first." This has been often quoted, and it is quite possible he made half-seriously some remark of the kind, for however good her judgment, she was not a cultured woman. Her spelling was not immaculate, and she had little acquaintance with or inclination for classical literature.

But whatever her qualities as political adviser or literary critic, these were minor features of the services to Disraeli which earned for her the designation of "a perfect wife." Mr. Froude was probably not wrong in supposing that Disraeli had his own marital conditions in mind when he wrote of the one worldly blessing that had been denied to Sidonia: "The lot most precious to man, and which a beneficent Providence has not made the least common—to find in another heart a most perfect and profound sympathy, to unite his existence to one who could share all his joys, soften all his sorrows, aid him in all his projects, respond to all his fancies, console him in his cares and support him in his perils, make life charming by her charms, interesting by her intelligence, and sweet by the variety of her tenderness."

Sidonia was a sort of idealised personification of

The Perfect Wife

himself, and this picture of a perfect wife was an idealisation of his own. In more commonplace language, it would be true to say that she made it the work of her life to give him peace and quiet comfort at home, to consult his tastes and humour his fancies, to please and amuse him, and, not least, to keep his finances in something like order.

She was, indeed, a practical and prudent housewife, and careful of the small things peculiar to the woman's share in the conjugal partnership. On their travels abroad she would pick up an idea in dress or cookery, and make note of it for use at home. When in Paris in 1842 she saw something new in stays, and told Disraeli to advise his sister not to buy stays until their return home. During the honeymoon she came across a recipe for Spanish pudding, of which she made good use. The pudding being served at a party they gave in London, Lord Lyndhurst recognised it as what he had had at Bradenham, and another guest asked Mrs. Disraeli for the recipe, but she would not give it. Some years later, during a visit to Cassel, in French Flanders, Disraeli informed his sister that they had hired a French cook, "who, Mary Anne desires me to tell my mother, stews pigeons in the most delicious way: eggs, cloves, and onions, ending with a red-brown sauce."

Mary Anne Disraeli

It needs little imagination to derive from little incidents of this kind the impression of a woman watchful for every opportunity to add to the attractions of the domestic amenities which smoothed the rough path of her husband's public life. His household account books, preserved at Hughenden, give proof of careful and economical management. And if in these respects she was but as other good wives, her devotion to him sometimes took a form peculiar to herself. Throughout their married life she cut his hair every two or three weeks—meticulously preserving the curl over the forehead which is a characteristic feature of the portraits and caricatures. And she kept the hair! This Disraeli discovered when examining his dead wife's treasures. She had never reaped the crop without, as he put it, "garnering the harvest"; and he sent a packet of it to Lord Rowton, who had once asked for a specimen of his hair of an early date. To cut the hair was a mark of affection; to keep it, surely, an act of adoration.

The perfect wife found in Disraeli a perfect husband. The expression was used in a pathetic note of counsel and farewell left among her private papers. In the 'fifties she suffered several times from serious illness, and was obsessed by a fear lest on her decease Disraeli should be left desolate and neglected. The

The Perfect Wife

letter, found after her death, was dated June 6th, 1856, and read as follows:

MY OWN DEAR HUSBAND,—If I should depart this life before you, leave orders that we may be buried in the same grave, at whatever distance you may be from England. And now, God bless you, my kindest, dearest! You have been a perfect husband to me. Be put by my side in the same grave. And now farewell, my dear Dizzy. Do not live alone, dearest. Someone, I earnestly hope, you may find as attached to you as your own devoted

MARY ANNE.

In conjunction with this touching message may fittingly be placed a memorandum—also intended to be read posthumously—which had been written by Disraeli fourteen years before. It was addressed to Isaac D'Israeli, with the apparent object of assuring to Mary Anne, should she be left a widow, her husband's share in his father's estate. The memorandum was dated August 13th, 1842, and was to be opened in the event of Disraeli's decease before his father. In it he said he was commencing a new era of worldly prosperity and mental satisfaction, due to the unexampled devotion of his beloved wife. "Ever since our marriage," he said, "she has de-

Mary Anne Disraeli

frayed either for Parliamentary contests so indispensable to my career, or for debts incurred before our union, no less a sum than £13,000, and is prepared to grapple with claims and incumbrances to an amount not inferior. . . . To her ceaseless vigilance and unbroken devotion I am indebted for even existence.”

It may be observed on this that Disraeli had fought but one Parliamentary contest since his marriage, and the use of the plural supports the supposition that she or Mr. Lewis gave him financial assistance at earlier elections. The fight at Shrewsbury, where Mary Anne was a very conspicuous figure, was the political event personal to her husband which stands out most prominently in connection with their early married life, and we may now resume the narrative of events which followed the return from the honeymoon.



VII. THE "GAY LADY" AT
SHREWSBURY





WHEN Mrs. Wyndham Lewis wrote to her brother after the Maidstone election, predicting for Disraeli a brilliant future, she included among the factors which would assure his success "Wyndham's power to keep him in Parliament." Whether owing to the elimination of that element or to other causes, Disraeli determined soon after the death of his colleague not to stand again for the Kentish borough, and in the General Election of 1841 he fought at Shrewsbury one of the bitterest contests of his career. Shrewsbury had for many years been represented almost invariably by a Whig and a Tory, though there had never since the beginning of the century been an unopposed return. In the matter of corruption, the reputation of the constituency was no cleaner than that of Maidstone, and a contest in 1796 is said to have cost the candidates £100,000. Mrs. Disraeli seems to have determined to do what in her lay to compensate her husband for the loss of "Wyndham's power to keep him in Parliament." She threw herself into the con-

Mary Anne Disraeli

flict with an enthusiasm and effectiveness which extorted the admiration of his opponents. The *Liberal Globe* enviously declared that "his wife assisted at his canvass with all the energy of despair." The canvass in those days was deemed more important than the speeches, and Disraeli told his sister that at Shrewsbury it was "most severe, from eight o'clock in the morning till sunset, scarcely with half an hour's bait."

The election was another triumph for Disraeli. As at Maidstone, he succeeded in capturing the second seat for the Conservatives, being returned with Colonel Tomline by a substantial majority. The local Liberal paper reported that after the harangues of the two successful candidates at the close of the poll, Mrs. Disraeli was introduced to the crowd, and "her successful canvass was rewarded with reiterated cheers." Then followed the "chairing," which Disraeli found "gorgeous and fatiguing," and they "quaffed the triumphal cup at forty different spots in Salop." After a week-end rest with Sir Baldwin Leighton at Loton Park, the Disraelis got back to town on July 6th, to await the overtures from Peel which both fondly hoped would be made to the young victor on the formation of the Conservative Government.

The "Gay Lady" at Shrewsbury

While her husband remained member for Shrewsbury Mary Anne was diligent in maintaining his popularity there. On returning from a visit to the town in 1843 Disraeli wrote to his sister: "After dinner we went to the Bachelors' Ball. Mary Anne, who never looked so well (in white, with a dark wreath of velvet flowers twined with diamonds) was the grand lady of the evening, and led out to supper by the Mayor." At a dinner he made a fine speech, and was very pleased with himself, but "M. A. was in the gallery, and got even more cheering than I did." A year later he was at Shrewsbury three days without his wife, and in a letter to her, he said: "Wherever I go I hear nothing but 'Mrs. Disraeli,' and why she did not come, and when she will come. . . . Among the shopkeepers, whom I wish most to please, your name and memory are most lively and influential. 'Such a gay lady, Sir! You never can have a dull moment, Sir'—and I tell them all that you are a perfect wife, as well as a perfect companion, and that separated from you for the first time in five years [not quite accurate, this] we are alas! alas! parted on our wedding day. The women shed tears, which indeed I can hardly myself restrain. . . . Our wedding feast must be on Thursday, but if I die for it I will write you some verses to-morrow."

Mary Anne Disraeli

Next day he attended a dinner, at which the chairman, a maltster named Taylor, proposing the health of Mrs. Disraeli, declared that being her husband was a very good reason why Mr. Disraeli should be member for Shrewsbury. Telling her this, he said the feeling for her in Shrewsbury was beyond description. Much of this may have been the persiflage of infatuation, but there is sufficient evidence of her popularity to show that Disraeli was not without justification when he ascribed his political success to his wife.

Although, however, Mary Anne might capture the hearts of the susceptible Salopians, she met with a chilling repulse when she sought to influence in her husband's favour the judgment of an austere statesman engaged in the delicate operation of forming a Ministry. This is not the place to repeat the story of Disraeli's application to Peel for office in 1841, and his audacious denial afterwards of having ever made any such application, but a collateral point may be noted. We have seen how, when he made what was in effect, though not in form, an appeal to Mrs. Lewis not to jilt him, he depicted himself as an unfortunate being whose rejection would excite the derision of his enemies. So now his letter to the incoming Prime Minister conveyed the impression

The "Gay Lady" at Shrewsbury

that there was a general expectation of his inclusion in the Ministry, and he begged Peel to save him from the "intolerable humiliation" of being unrecognised. According to Abraham Hayward, Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli had told their friends he expected to be made Secretary to the Admiralty.

The appeal was written from Grosvenor Gate on September 5th, 1841, and was supplemented by a "humble petition" from his wife. Mr. Stuart Parker, who first disclosed the letter to the world in the Peel Papers (though it had been shown to Sir Algernon West by Lord Peel some years before), says it was probably written without Disraeli's knowledge. Perhaps so, but who can tell? The letter ran:

GROSVENOR GATE,

Saturday night.

Confidential.

DEAR SIR ROBERT PEEL,—I beg you not to be angry with me for my intrusion, but I am overwhelmed with anxiety. My husband's political career is for ever crushed, if you do not appreciate him.

Mr. Disraeli's exertions are not unknown to you, but there is much he has done that you cannot be

Mary Anne Disraeli

aware of, though they have had no other aim but to do you honour, no wish for recompense but your approbation.

He has gone farther than most to make your opponents his personal enemies. He has stood four most expensive elections since 1834, and gained seats from the Whigs in two, and I pledge myself as far as one seat, that it shall always be at your command.

Literature he has abandoned for politics. Do not destroy all his hopes and make him feel his life has been a mistake.

May I venture to name my own humble but enthusiastic exertions in times gone by for the party, or rather for your own splendid self? They will tell you at Maidstone that more than £40,000 was spent through my influence only.

Be pleased not to answer this, as I do not wish any human being to know I have written to you this humble petition.

I am now, as ever, dear Sir Robert,

Your most faithful servant,

MARY ANNE DISRAELI.

The makers of Ministries are accustomed to receiving curious "confidential" communications, and Peel was doubtless more amused than offended by the humble petition. The writer was known to him,

The "Gay Lady" at Shrewsbury

and his sister, Mrs. Dawson, was one of her personal friends. He appears to have complied with the lady's request that he should not reply to her letter.

Disraeli had more than one cause for chagrin on the failure of his application for office under the Crown. The financial consideration, though secondary, was by no means negligible. When he went down with Mr. (Sir) Phillip Rose, his legal adviser (in succession to Mr. Pyne), to open the campaign at Shrewsbury, his companion noticed on a barn door a big poster. Stopping the post-chaise, he said, "It is something about you." Disraeli turned his eyeglass towards the poster, and deliberately scrutinised the words printed on it. At the head of the *affiche* he read: "Judgment debts of Benjamin Disraeli, Tory candidate for Shrewsbury." Then followed a long list of creditors, and of the sums upon which judgment had been signed. The total, according to Sir Phillip Rose, who told the story to the Hon. F. Lawley, amounted to between £20,000 and £30,000. Pondering long over the names and figures, Disraeli at length turned round and said: "How accurate they are! Now let us go on."

On the basis of this disclosure, Disraeli was accused of wishing to get into Parliament to avoid bankruptcy, or imprisonment for debt. He issued an

Mary Anne Disraeli

address declaring that all the writs had been completely satisfied, and assuring the electors that he would not have sought to represent them had he not possessed that "ample independence which rendered the attainment of office in the State, except as recognition of public service, a matter of complete indifference." For this declaration such excuse as electioneering exigencies afford may be pleaded. Many debts had been paid, but he still owed something over £20,000.

A protest he made to his solicitor a year after his marriage shows that he did not disclose his financial difficulties even to his wife, and that she resented this limitation to the confidence he placed in her. A writ had been delivered to her during his absence from home, and for this he blamed Mr. Pyne. It had, he said, with other circumstances, produced a terrible domestic crisis—the only evidence discoverable of any dissension between them during their matrimonial union of thirty-three years.



VIII. ANECDOTAL





ON taking up their residence at Grosvenor Gate, Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli mingled freely in Society, entertaining and being entertained, and Mary Anne adapted herself to her environment, sometimes in a rather curious way. Although not an adherent to the Jewish faith, Disraeli was at least as ready as his enemies to remember that he was a member of the race whose name he bore, and the great Jewish families took him to their arms. In this, as in all social affairs, his wife shared his privileges and his sympathies. When the Jews' Oaths of Abjuration Bill passed its second reading in July, 1845, she hastened to congratulate Lady de Rothschild, and to express her happiness at "the glorious result of the debate." One of their first engagements on returning from the honeymoon in December, 1839, was to dine again with Mrs. Abraham Montefiore. It was a Jewish party. There were, Disraeli tells his sister, "Rothschilds, Montefiores, Alberts, and Disraelis—not a Christian name, but Mary Anne bears it all like a philosopher." The dinner, which he describes as

Mary Anne Disraeli

en famille, was given to meet Anthony de Rothschild, who was to marry Mrs. Montefiore's daughter Louisa, one of the young ladies who had been astonished earlier in the year by the announcement of their brilliant friend's impending marriage with Mrs. Lewis.

Louisa, as the wife of Anthony, became Lady de Rothschild on his receiving a baronetcy five years afterwards, and was one of the most distinguished ladies in the aristocratic circles of her day. They were neighbours of the Disraelis in Buckinghamshire, and at Aston Clinton she and her daughters (Lady Battersea and Mrs. Eliot Yorke) entertained most of the political and literary and artistic celebrities of their time. Sir Anthony was a brother of Baron Lionel de Rothschild, whose eldest son became the first Lord Rothschild, and was one of Disraeli's executors. A younger son, Leopold, was born in 1845, and Lady Battersea, his cousin, tells an amusing story of a visit paid to the Baroness by Mrs. Disraeli soon after his birth. "My dear," she said to the mother, "that beautiful baby may be the future Messiah whom we are led to expect—who knows? And you will be the most favoured of women!" This may not be a happy example of Mary Anne's "philosophy" in adapting herself to association with the

Jewish families, but it does not seem to have given offence, and Lady Battersea says she believes Leopold, when a young child, was called "Little Messiah."

Opportunity may be taken at this point to glance at some other anecdotes to be found in biographies and memoirs illustrating the ingenuousness and candour of Mrs. Disraeli's conversation. Some of these vary in detail, and cannot be depended upon for historical accuracy, but there is a substratum of truth easily discernible, sufficient to give an authentic impression of a woman remarkably free and unconventional in her talk, with a tendency to dwell, whimsically and sometimes indelicately, upon conjugal intimacies. This tendency persisted to the end of her days—may, indeed, have strengthened with advancing years. Disraeli himself told Lord Rowton of a funny thing she said when on a visit to Lady Waldegrave a few months before her death. She delighted her hostess's husband (Mr. Chichester Fortescue, afterwards Lord Carlingford) by telling him she had heard him very much praised, and on his asking her when and where, she replied "It was in bed."

A story that has become familiar was told by Sir William Fraser in "Disraeli and His Day." Mary

Mary Anne Disraeli

Anne was a guest at one of the most splendid of our provincial palaces. The wife of the proprietor was a person of exceptional refinement, and had swept the walls of all pictures the most squeamish people might object to. But it happened that in the bedroom occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli one remained of a decidedly classic character as regards drapery. At breakfast next morning, Mrs. Disraeli said to her hostess: "Lady —, I find that your house is full of indecent pictures. There is a most horrible picture in our bedroom. Dizzy says it is Venus and Adonis. I have been awake half the night trying to prevent him looking at it." Fraser said he knew this to be true, because it was told to him by the elder son of the house, who was present at breakfast—which may be sufficient voucher for the groundwork of the anecdote, but hardly for the detail.

The story, indeed, has a suspicious resemblance to one told of Sir William Harcourt by Mr. Cecil Raikes in the biography of his father. Harcourt was dining with the Disraelis and sat next the hostess. She noticed that he was looking at the picture of a lightly-robed Venus on the wall opposite, and said to him, "It ought not to be allowed in here, but it is nothing to the Venus that Dizzy has in his bedroom." "That I can well believe," said Harcourt, with a

gallant bow. He was a little abashed, and turned the conversation, but Mary Anne was delighted with the compliment, and afterwards in the drawing-room told her husband, before all the guests, of the amusing thing Harcourt had said to her. In telling the story, Harcourt said he never felt more uncomfortable, but Disraeli made no comment, merely turning his eyes upon her with his usual grave smile.

Lord Malmesbury, in his diary on March 19th, 1849, recorded, on the authority of Lord Mahon (the historian, afterwards Earl Stanhope), another breakfast-table conversation during a visit to a country house, when Mrs. Disraeli, learning that Lord Hardinge's bed was in the next room to theirs, boasted that she was the happiest of women, for she had slept between the greatest orator and the greatest soldier of the time. Lord Mahon said Lady Hardinge did not seem to like the reference to her husband.

Sir William Gregory, who knew the Disraelis well, has in his biography some very uncomplimentary observations on the lady, which shall be referred to later. As an example of her style of conversation, he says that once, when reference was made to some man's clear complexion, she said: "Ah! I wish you could only see Dizzy in his bath, then you would know what a white skin is." That she regarded the

clarity of his complexion as one of his charms is shown by an incident related by John Phillip, R.A., to his friend W. P. Firth. Phillip was commissioned by Mr. Speaker Denison in the 'sixties to paint a picture of a portion of the House of Commons, introducing some of the most eminent members, who gave him sittings for the purpose. At his first visit Disraeli was accompanied by his wife. The colours were necessarily crude, and she feared justice was not being done to his complexion. When they had gone out to their carriage, she ran back and said to the artist, "Remember, his pallor is his best beauty," and without another word rejoined her husband. Lord Frederick Hamilton said that when a boy he was absolutely frightened by the look of Disraeli, so white was his face. On another occasion, Mrs. Disraeli accompanied her husband to the studio of a photographer who had asked for a sitting. A pedestal being placed for him to lean upon, she ran forward and pushed it away, exclaiming: "Dizzy has never had anyone but me to lean upon, and he shall not be shown with a prop now."

Sir William Gregory says there was hardly any circumstance in their domestic life which Mary Anne did not take a pleasure in narrating in public. One night after dinner she said to Sir William and three

or four other young men, including George Smythe, the original of Coningsby: "Would you like to go and see the room where Dizzy was brought to bed of 'Coningsby'?" All expressed much interest in the revered spot, and were invited by her to go upstairs to the bedroom floor and open a certain door. George Smythe took the lead in a regular scamper upstairs, and burst into the wrong room, which was quite dark. A splash and a cry were heard, and Smythe came out wet through, having fallen into Disraeli's bath. He presented himself in a drenched condition to Mrs. Disraeli, who asked him if he had seen the room where "Coningsby" was born. "I know nothing of the place of his birth," said Smythe, "but I have been in the room where he was recently baptised." Here again there is doubtless some basis for the trivial tale, but Sir William Gregory's memory for detail may be tested by the fact that on the same page he says Wyndham Lewis was a colleague of Disraeli in the representation of Shrewsbury.

Other stories of a like kind—such as that which attributes to Mrs. Disraeli the folly of having told Queen Victoria, of all persons, that she always slept with her arms round her husband's neck—may be ignored as fabulous. Sufficient has been said here to indicate broadly the direction her loquacity would

sometimes take. As M. Maurois happily puts it, she made Disraeli live in "a paradise of slightly comical adoration," and contemporary reports agree in this—that whatever indiscretions she may have committed in public, either by word or deed, he endured them with good-humoured complacency. He would himself, sometimes, in a quiet way, manifest publicly his affection and admiration. M. Maurois recalls that when in 1853 he received an honorary degree at Oxford, and heard the plaudits of the undergraduates, an animated look appeared on his immobile countenance, and, turning to the ladies' gallery, where Mary Anne was seated, he quietly threw a kiss to her with his hand. The lady herself would be more demonstrative. Sometimes, even in public, she would take his hand and kiss it humbly.

We can refuse credit to Sir William Gregory's statement, as an example of Disraeli's uxoriousness, that coming up once from dinner he knelt before her, covered her hand with kisses, and exclaimed lackadaisically: "Is there anything I can do for my dear little wife?" But it is doubtless true, as the same writer says, that she told him Dizzy treated her more as a mistress than as a wife, for the same expression is used in a very credible anecdote related by Mr. Kebbel in his "Tory Memories." After the first

division on the Reform Bill of 1867 there was great enthusiasm for Disraeli's clever management of the debate, and his triumph over Gladstone. On his way home he called at the Carlton Club, where the jubilant Conservatives pressed him to stay for supper, but he insisted on going home. Mrs. Disraeli told Kebbel afterwards, with manifest pride, that he preferred to come to her; and she proceeded to describe the supper she gave him. "I had got him a raised pie from Fortnum and Mason's, and a bottle of champagne, and he ate half the pie and drank all the champagne, and then he said, 'Well, my dear, you are more like a mistress than a wife.' " And Mr. Kebbel adds that it was evident she took it as a very high compliment.

There need be no hesitation, again, in accepting in substance the anecdote of his rebuke to someone who asked him what he saw in this elderly and unattractive lady that induced him to shower so much affection on her. The most familiar version is that of Sir William Gregory, who attributes the impertinence to Disraeli's friend Smythe. "George," was the retort, "there is one word in the English language of which you are ignorant." "What is that?" asked Smythe, somewhat taken aback. "Gratitude," said Disraeli, in his deep, solemn voice. Smythe felt the rebuke

acutely, and accepted the lesson. The Hon. Henry Coke states, on the authority of Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, that the interlocutor was Bernal Osborne, and it is not unlikely to have been one of that gentleman's mordant witticisms.

That Disraeli resented reflections on his wife there is abundant evidence, and he showed not a little courage in guarding her from offensiveness. "When visiting at the big houses," wrote Sir John Skelton, in 1868, "where the big ladies fight a little shy of her, he won't stand nonsense." It was a case of "Love me, love my Mary Anne." People might laugh when he was not looking, but "there was something fine in his jealous and watchful regard." An example of this is given by Lord Bryce in his "Biographical Studies." He says a story used to be told that Disraeli and his wife, in his younger days, when his political position was far from assured, were the guests of the chief of his party, who so far forgot his good manners as to quiz Mrs. Disraeli at the dinner-table. Next morning Disraeli, who was to have stayed several days, announced that he must leave immediately. Though his host begged him to stay, and made all sorts of apologies, the offended husband was inexorable, and carried his wife off forthwith.

Sir John Skelton said also that Mrs. Disraeli had "splendid pluck," and there are on record several examples of her conduct which illustrate alike her courage and her solicitude for her husband. On her way to Hatfield for a visit to the Salisburys she fell and cut her face. Disraeli was to come later. On her arrival she said to Lady Salisbury, "My husband is preparing a great speech. If he finds out I have had an accident he will be quite upset. I want you to take me straight to my room and say I have a headache. He has lost his eyeglass, and if you put me a long way from him at dinner he will never see what a condition I am in." This was done, and Disraeli did not discover for two days what had happened.

Another example is the well-known case of the trapping of her fingers in a carriage door. Lady Battersea says her mother used to relate how on one memorable occasion, when Mrs. Disraeli had driven to the House of Commons with her husband, her hand was caught in the carriage door by a careless young footman. The pain was excruciating, but no sound escaped her lips, lest his equanimity be disturbed on the eve of one of his great speeches. Lord Malmesbury related the incident in his speech in the House of Lords on the erection of a memorial to Lord Beaconsfield in Westminster Abbey, and said

it was told to him by Disraeli himself. In *The Times* obituary notice of Lady Beaconsfield it was stated that she concealed the pain throughout the long drive to Westminster, but the more authentic record is that the accident occurred when Disraeli left the carriage. According to Sir William Gregory, her fingers were trapped when Disraeli himself shut the door on taking leave of her.

To the personal incidents indicative of the intimate relationship of this curious couple may be added two vouched for by Mr. Sichel in his biography of the statesman. While he was at Glasgow to be inaugurated Lord Rector of the University, he heard good tidings of an old associate, and he wrote afterwards: "Mrs. Disraeli and I were overjoyed, and we danced a Highland fling in our nightgowns." Mr. Sichel does not say to whom this was written, and here, as in other cases, there are different versions of what seems to be the same incident. One of the extracts from Sir John Skelton's diary, given in his "Table Talk of Shirley," records some conversation with Disraeli on the occasion of his visit to Edinburgh in 1867 to receive the freedom of the city. "We were," said Disraeli, "so delighted with our reception—Mrs. Disraeli and I—that after we got back we actually danced a jig (or was it a hornpipe?) in our bedroom. Mr. Sichel's

other story is that Mrs. Disraeli, waiting up for her husband after a critical debate (it must have been in her old age), entered the library in the small hours of the morning, in negligée, and impetuously embraced one who turned out to be Lord Cairns, writing an important minute before Disraeli's arrival.

There will be occasion later to quote some impartial estimates of the personality of Lady Beaconsfield. In the meantime, these few anecdotes have been put together in the spirit of honest old Herodotus, who, with the intent to entertain his readers and at the same time give them a broad impression of what had happened, set down the things he had been told, but said it must not be assumed that he believed all of them to be strictly true.



IX. AT THE COUNTRY HOUSES





THE decade following Disraeli's marriage was the most momentous period in his career. In 1839 he was a Parliamentary neophyte, a literary aspirant, and a homeless bachelor, accepted in smart Society as an amusing guest. Ten years later he had won his way to the head of the Tory party in the House of Commons, had, by the publication of "Coningsby," "Sybil," and "Tancred," taken rank with the most eminent of English novelists, was the host of many distinguished people at a fine house in London, had a mansion and estate in the country, and represented his county in Parliament. In one way and another, his wife had no small share in the impulsion to this meteoric advance in his fortunes.

Soon after obtaining the use of her income and of the house at Grosvenor Gate, he began to assume that *rôle* in the social life of London which in those days appertained almost essentially to political leadership. In January, 1841, he gave his first male dinner party; a few weeks later he felt sufficiently sure of his Parliamentary position to invite sixty members of

the House of Commons to dine with him, and forty of them accepted his hospitality.

Early in 1842 Mrs. Disraeli was some weeks at Bradenham, detained there by the illness of her mother, who died the same year. Disraeli remained in town and wrote her almost daily, lamenting their separation, which, he said, taught them to love each other, if possible, more and more. At the close of the session they went for a holiday to Paris, taking rooms at their old quarters, the Hôtel de l'Europe, overlooking the gardens of the Tuileries. Mrs. Disraeli had not been well, but again found the French capital refreshing and congenial. On October 14th Disraeli reported to his sister that she was completely recovered, and he never saw her looking so well. They had a *cuisinière bourgeoise*, and gave little dinner parties. They attended many brilliant functions, and Mary Anne was introduced to M. Thiers and other notable personages. She could not be presented to the King and Queen, as the Court was in mourning for the Duc d'Orleans, but her husband saw much of Louis Philippe, and seems to have become rather a favourite with His Majesty.

They returned to England early in the new year, and led a very active life, varying the labours and gaieties of London with visits to the ever-widening

circle of their friends. The Duchess of Rutland wrote picturesquely in later years: "The halls of Mentmore, the sweet shades of Cliveden, the libraries of Knowsley, the galleries of Blenheim; Bretby, with all its associations of wit; Hatfield, with all its charms of past and present; Weston, with its glorious oaks; Knole, with its antique chambers, its eighty staircases; and Trentham, with its terraced gardens, among other places, were all houses where he was eagerly welcomed." The Duchess might have added her own home of Belvoir, whose magnificence was thinly veiled by Disraeli in "*Coningsby*," in his description of Beaumanoir.

Not all these places were open to the Disraelis in the early years of their married life, but they were welcomed with esteem at many country houses. One of these was Fryston Hall, Yorkshire, and a party assembled there in the autumn of 1844 is worth some attention, as it affords an opportunity to see Mary Anne through the eyes of a very acute observer. Fryston was the home of Richard Monckton Milnes, the author, wit, politician, and man of fashion, whom Disraeli depicted in "*Tancred*" as Vavasour. He became the first Lord Houghton, and was father of the Marquess of Crewe, who married in 1899 the daughter of Lord Rosebery. Milnes was a friend of

Disraeli, and they entered the House of Commons at the same time. They sat together, and when Disraeli, at the close of his first speech, made his famous declaration, "The time will come when you will hear me," Milnes turned to him and said: "Yes, old fellow, so they will." It was at this Fryston party that Disraeli made the acquaintance of Gathorne Hardy, then a young lawyer, who was destined in later years to be one of his most redoubtable henchmen, and whom he raised to the peerage as Viscount Cranbrook. The entries in Hardy's diary, edited by his son, indicate that he was not greatly impressed by his future leader. He was, however, in a critical mood, and his son omits "some rather outspoken comments on some of his fellow-guests." Among these guests was Lady Elizabeth Spencer-Stanhope, whose "Letter Bag" has been finely edited by Mrs. Sterling. She was a daughter of the famous Mr. Coke of Holkham, who was for many years Father of the House of Commons, and became in his old age first Earl of Leicester in the new creation.

Lady Elizabeth wielded a facile pen, and in her letters there is frequent evidence of a sound and candid judgment. We may therefore accept with some confidence the description of Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli which she sent from Fryston to her husband,

At the Country Houses

Colonel John Spencer-Stanhope. After references to other members of the party, she comes to "last, but not least, D'Israeli and Mrs. D'Izzy"—an unusual form of literation of the familiar diminutive. At dinner she sat between Disraeli and Mrs. Milnes (Monckton's mother), and "was really charmed, not with any brilliancy of the conversation, but with his singularity and good nature," as an example of which she tells how he dressed the truffles for her. She then gives her impressions of Mary Anne:

"Mrs. D'Izzy was in a lace dress, looped up on each side, over pink satin, and a wreath on her head, though I should think near fifty. [She was in her 52nd year.] However, she is very amusing and off-hand, saying everything that comes uppermost and unfeignedly devoted to her D'Izzy. She does not give herself airs, and seems very good-natured. This morning she has been giving us an account of the scenes between Sir Lytton Bulwer and Lady Bulwer, and her own ineffectual attempts to reconcile them; and then, to my great amusement, went off in the most violent eulogium on Mrs. Duncombe's sweetness of temper, and the admirable manner in which she had been brought up!"

Why Lady Elizabeth should have been so much

amused by Mrs. Disraeli's eulogium of Mrs. Duncombe is not obvious, though there is a hint of the reason in an earlier part of the letter. The lady's husband, who was also a guest, was Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, known popularly as "Honest Tom Duncombe," then a man about fifty years of age. Nephew of the first Baron Feversham, he was a Yorkshireman of sturdy if eccentric character, and made a great name for himself as a "friend of liberty." After spending £40,000 to gain and keep a seat at Hertford, he was ousted in 1832 by the Hatfield House influence, and for the rest of his life was Radical member for Finsbury. There is no indication in the "Dictionary of National Biography" that he was ever married, and the only reference to his wife in the two-volume *Life* written by his son is a statement at the end that he left a widow. Apparently, therefore, there was something dubious about the lady. This at least seems to have been the opinion of Lady Elizabeth Stanhope, who, in another part of the letter, said of Mrs. Duncombe that "she has beauty enough to justify the mistake he has made; though rather under-jawed, her hair and complexion are the most beautiful I ever saw. I suppose she is fond of him, as she told Miss Milnes she was the happiest woman in existence."

Still, Lady Elizabeth was surprised that Mrs. Disraeli should have admired her sweetness of temper and the manner in which she had been brought up. May it not be taken as illustrating one aspect of Mrs. Disraeli's own character? In all the records of her no trace is to be found of a disposition to judge others harshly or unkindly.

Old Mr. Milnes was a capital host, and had on this occasion taken special pains to please his guests, especially, it would seem, the Disraelis. Having only a woman cook, he had borrowed from Lord Galway a first-class man, and Lady Elizabeth thought all this had been done for "D'Izzy," as the *cuisine* was far better than when she had visited Fryston before. Late hours were kept, and kept in festal fashion. One night Mr. Duncombe, worn out with heat and fatigue, fell asleep on a sofa, and Lord Galway took the opportunity to black his face. It was with difficulty that the butler, at two o'clock in the morning, roused him to go to bed. Disraeli, though usually bored by these country parties, appeared to enjoy the fun at Fryston. He was heartily amused by some amateur theatricals, in which Monckton Milnes took the part of Mrs. Gamp.

Lady Elizabeth always sat beside Disraeli at dinner, and her liking for him and for his wife grew

with better acquaintance. She wrote to her husband:

"Mrs. D'Izzy I like quite as much as her husband, and think her *equally* clever *in her way*. . . . She would idolise you for your admiration of her D'Izzy, as she calls him, for only my simple and *sincere* tribute this morning brought tears to her eyes. We have spent the whole morning *tête-à-tête*, and most amusing she has been, but I must keep all the good stories to make myself agreeable to you on my return."

Several of Lady Elizabeth's children were with her, and her son Walter was also favourably impressed by "the great man," who, said the presumptuous youth, seemed "a very unaffected good sort of fellow, and of more importance in his appearance and features than one would suppose from the caricatures." It was not often in those days that Disraeli was described as unaffected.

In the scattered records of the experiences of the Disraelis in the stately homes of England, the scene changes to Stowe, in Buckinghamshire, now a public school, then the palatial residence of the Duke of Buckingham. The Duke of that day had as Lord Chandos been one of the best friends of Disraeli when the barriers of prejudice and caste impeded the entrance of the young Jew to the upper circles of

Society. A few months after the Fryston party, in January, 1845, the Duke had the honour of entertaining Queen Victoria at Stowe, and he invited a number of his friends to meet Her Majesty. Among these were Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli, and in one of the most interesting of Mary Anne's letters that have survived she gave to Sarah Disraeli an account of their sufferings and their triumphs:

"We were for the first half hour in the vestibule, like a flock of sheep, half lit up and no seats or fire; only a little hot air and a great deal of cold wind; a marble floor. Fancy dear shivering Dizzy, and cross Mary Anne, in black velvet, hanging sleeves, looped up with knots of blue, and diamond buttons; head-dress blue velvet bows and diamonds." Afterwards all passed Her Majesty and were presented, and the Queen retired. "Then all became joy and triumph for us. The Duke almost embraced Dizzy, saying he was one of his oldest friends; and then he offered me his arm, taking me all through the gorgeous, splendid scene, through the supper room and back again, down the middle and up again, all making way for us—the Queen and your delighted Mary Anne the only ladies so distinguished." What would not one give for a few snapshots or a description of the scene by a good impressionist writer!

The Disraelis had as yet no country house of their own in which to spend the Parliamentary recess—that was one of the joys to come—and in the autumn of the same year, 1845, after a session of strenuous belligerency, they again took a Continental holiday, this time a very quiet one. Crossing from Dover to Boulogne, they travelled *en voiture* by St. Omer to Cassel. They did not intend to stay there, but finding the place secluded and beautiful, they took a house for a month, which was extended to two. They had a pretty garden, the weather was fine and mild, and they greatly enjoyed the change from the turmoil of London, going to bed at nine o'clock and getting up at half-past five. In these circumstances, Disraeli made good progress with his writing—probably he was at work on “Tancred.” On leaving Cassel he told Lionel de Rothschild they had passed more than two months in absolute solitude. Mary Anne had in that time walked 300 miles, of which she was very proud, and had derived much benefit from the exercise. Before returning home they had a change to livelier scenes, spending most of December in Paris, though Disraeli must have been anxiously on the *qui vive*, for it was during this month that Peel resigned, and resumed office on Lord John Russell’s failure to form a Ministry.



X. THE LADY OF HUGHENDEN





THE session of 1846 was notable for the brilliance and virulence of Disraeli's attacks on Peel. After the passage of the Corn Law Bill and the downfall of the Conservative Government, and Peel's declaration that he should not again take office, Disraeli's accession to the leadership of the Conservative party in the Lower House became, as we can now see, inevitable, though at the time it appeared incredible, such was the prejudice against his personality. It is unnecessary to dwell upon the manœuvres and evolutions from which Disraeli emerged in 1849 as the acknowledged leader, but reference must be made to a factor in the struggle which affected profoundly the remainder of Mrs. Disraeli's life. This was the acquisition of Hughenden. It was a curious transaction, a bold adventure. Mr. Froude, who wrote his biography before the facts became known, said the portion of his father's estate which came to Disraeli was sufficient to enable him to purchase Hughenden, though he says also it would never have been Disraeli's property but for

the assistance given him by Mrs. Brydges Willyams. Both statements are very wide of the mark. The patrimony did not amount to one-third of the price paid, and it was fifteen years after this that the legacy was received from Mrs. Willyams. Nor is it true, as stated in the "D.N.B.," that it was purchased with his wife's fortune; she had little capital.

Disraeli had long coveted the beautiful demesne, lying but a few miles from his home at Bradenham, and when it came into the market on the death of the owner in 1845, he began overtures for its acquisition. But he was still in debt, and his financial resources, and those of his wife, were woefully inadequate for the purpose. It was to his friend and patron Lord George Bentinck that he was indebted for the realisation of his hopes. The story of how the help was given, told in the official biography, was supplemented in 1926, when Lady Londonderry published the reminiscences of her father, Lord Chaplin. He was evidently the friend anonymously mentioned in the biography as having received from Lord Henry Bentinck an account of how he and his brothers helped to provide Disraeli with one of the qualifications for playing "the great game." According to Lord Chaplin's account, Lord George, going down to Welbeck anxious and distressed, was



HUGHENDEN MANOR AND TERRACE GARDEN

The Lady of Hughenden

asked by Henry what troubled him. "It is this," he said, "I have found the party the most wonderful man the world has ever seen, and I cannot get these fools to take him as leader because he is not a country gentleman." "Is that your only trouble, George?" said his brother. "If so, the remedy is perfectly simple—make him one." "If you are ready to help me," replied Lord George, "you are perfectly right. The matter is perfectly simple."

Lord George, the narrative continues, forthwith gave instructions to one of the principal land agents in London to find a country residence within easy reach of London, which would be suitable for a prominent politician, who might soon be in the position of Prime Minister. This arrangement was quickly carried out by the agent, who secured the offer of the property at Hughenden, which happened to be in the market. This information was conveyed by Lord George to Mr. Disraeli, and money was provided on such terms as would enable him with all propriety to take advantage of the offer.

Lord Chaplin's recollection was not quite accurate. When the offer was made Disraeli had for some time been negotiating for the property, but was at his wits' end to find the money. In March, 1847, his father made on his behalf a provisional contract of purchase,

but the transaction was not completed until September, 1848, apparently after the Bentincks had intervened, though even then the arrangement with them had not been finally settled. Disraeli's father had died in the meantime, leaving him about £11,000, and £25,000 was advanced on mortgage by the three brothers, the Marquess of Titchfield, Lord George, and Lord Henry. The purchase price was nearly £35,000, and the estate covered 750 acres.

There was an alarming sequel to the transaction. Lord Titchfield, as a Peelite, had no particular regard for Disraeli, and probably joined in the business merely to oblige his brothers. Lord George died almost at the moment when Hughenden was bought. In 1857 Lord Titchfield, having become Duke of Portland, decided to call in his money. The official biography says this drove Disraeli once more to the usurers, but according to Lord Chaplin, it was Lord Henry who got him out of the difficulty. "I posted up to London," he said, "the moment I became aware of it, went to the Jews, and borrowed enough money to pay off sufficient of the debt to prevent the possibility of Mr. Disraeli being disturbed in the possession of Hughenden." Lord Chaplin said he did not think Disraeli knew of this, or any other man, unless it was Lord Rothschild, or his father, Baron Lionel.

The Lady of Hughenden

So Disraeli became a country gentleman, and on September 6th, 1848, wrote proudly to his wife: "It is all done, and you are the Lady of Hughenden."

After the death of old Isaac D'Israeli in January, 1848, his wife having died nine months before, the home at Bradenham was broken up and the family were scattered. Ralph and James went to live in London, and Sarah at Twickenham, in one of the Ailsa Park villas, where she spent the remainder of her days, dying in 1859, at the age of fifty-seven. As M. Maurois says, Mary Anne became to Disraeli wife, mother, sister, and she played all these parts *à merveille*. The bulk of the family possessions came opportunely to Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli, and they were busily occupied towards the end of 1848 in removing to Hughenden—a distracting business for Disraeli, as the question of the leadership was at this time approaching its most critical stage. It had been brought to an issue by the death of Lord George Bentinck on September 21st. Writing from Bradenham on November 19th Disraeli told Lord John Manners he was "in the agonies of transition" from the old home to Hughenden, and was never more annoyed. When he wrote three days later it was from the new home, to tell Lord Londonderry about

the rumours afloat and intrigues that were going on. To get out of the turmoil of the transition, he and his wife went to spend Christmas with the Hobhouses at Erlestoke, Wiltshire, and it was there that he received from Lord Stanley a curious letter asking him to acquiesce in an offer of the leadership in the Commons to Mr. Herries, and hinting in polite terms that the party would rather accept a respectable mediocrity than a fantastic genius.

Disraeli no less politely intimated that if Herries were made leader he was more likely to harass than to help him. He went shortly afterwards to London, and in January he wrote to Lady Blessington apologising for not having fulfilled a promise to take Mary Anne to see her, as he was hurried to death and worn out. "We have," he said, "passed the last six weeks in moving from Bradenham to this place—a terrible affair, especially for the library, though only a few miles." He had, by the way, sold the greater part of his father's books. "I seem," he added, "to have lived in wagons like a Tartar chief. Would I were really one; but this is a life of trial, and Paradise, I hope, is a land where there are neither towns nor country." Three months later came the downfall of the gorgeous Lady Blessington and her



THE DRAWING-ROOM AT HUCHENDEN IN 1873

The Lady of Hughenden

equally gorgeous stepson, Count D'Orsay, and their flight to Paris—but that is another story.

While in London in January, watching the negotiations of his friends with the hostile or reluctant members of the party, Disraeli wrote almost daily to Mary Anne, reporting the progress of events, and it was at this time he told her how he missed the advantage of her advice. But she was more profitably employed than she would have been in political intrigue. She directed all the work of removal and settlement, and began that improvement of the Hughenden demesne for which in later years she was so often to be praised. Though evidence of a refined taste in interior decoration and furnishing was not conspicuous either at Hughenden or at Grosvenor Gate, her skill in landscape gardening is beyond question. But in the first year of their residence she was chiefly intent on putting the house in order and making it comfortable for dear Dizzy. It was only a commencement she made with the rearrangement of the grounds. And she worked hard and effectively. "My darling," he wrote to her at the end of January, 1849, "you have, I am sure, done at Hughenden what no other woman, or man either, could do. You have gained a year in our enjoyment of that place, where I trust every year we

shall be happier and happier." His sister and brothers also were delighted with her "magical touches" and clever arrangements.

The subsequent development of the woods and gardens was the work of years, and in 1863, when their financial position had been much strengthened, considerable improvements were made to the house. In September of that year Disraeli told Mrs. Brydges Willyams they had restored the house to what it was before the civil wars and had made a garden of terraces. This was but an elaboration of what had been done earlier, for in 1855 he said she had adorned her terrace in the Italian style with a series of beautiful vases which had come from Florence. The monument to Isaac D'Israeli, put up by Mary Anne in the absence of her husband, was also in the Italian style of the Renaissance period, and Disraeli described it as one of the most beautiful things in England.

Perhaps, however, the most noteworthy of the beauties of Hughenden was the woods. Many visitors have left on record the impressions made upon them by the sylvan charms of the estate, and the credit for this was always given by Disraeli to his wife. Lady Battersea recalls a visit made with her parents, when the hosts showed with pride the beauti-

The Lady of Hughenden

ful woods, which they called the German forest. With the assistance of two labourers, Mrs. Disraeli had cut out a number of cleverly-planned walks among the beeches, carefully trimming and felling the trees in places where views of more distant woods, or of the picturesque points of Wycombe, could be obtained. "This," said Disraeli to the Rothschilds, "is all owing to the cleverness of Mary Anne. She devised the walk, and she made it with the help of two old men of the soil."

It is permissible, however, to conjecture that she received some inspiration from her husband, directly or from the perusal of his writings. In "Henrietta Temple," many years before, describing the woods of Armine, he had written: "So artfully had the woods been planned that they seemed interminable, nor was there a single point in the whole pleasaunce where the keenest eye could have detected a limit. Sometimes you wandered on through arched and winding walks dear to pensive spirits; sometimes you emerged on a plot of turf blazing in the sunshine, a small and bright savannah." This fanciful picture bears a striking resemblance to the description of Hughenden woods given by Edmund Yates, in one of his "Celebrities at Home" series in the *World*:

"So cunningly are the narrow paths cut along the contours of the hills, now jutting out with a swelling spur, now running back at a sudden hollow, and so thick the screen of foliage on either hand, that the visitor seems to wander through endless avenues of vast woodlands, while he is really traversing a narrow curve."

Disraeli said once to a guest, "You cannot have terraces without peacocks." Mary Anne was of the same opinion, and peacocks became quite a feature of the place. Mr. Kebbel, who visited Hughenden in 1864, tells how he went out in the gardens with Mrs. Disraeli (who was sensibly attired in a short skirt, with stout gaiters) and was introduced to the peacocks, and the plants and trees from the East, including a cedar direct from Lebanon, and was shown the walks cut through the woods, to each of which a fancy name had been given—all planned by herself, with the approval of her husband. As time passed the gardens were planted to superabundance with trees—some of them commemorative of distinguished visitors—for she retained to the last her penchant for arboriculture. Early in the winter of 1871 Disraeli told Montagu Corry the severe weather had "quite sickened my lady," who had trusted to the planting and marking of trees to amuse her. So



THE DRAWING-ROOM AT HUGHENDEN, PRESENT TIME

The Lady of Hughenden

she sighed, he said, for Park Lane, and twilight talk and tea.

It was at Hughenden a year later that she died, and when he had lost her Disraeli found solace in happy memories of their mutual enjoyment of the demesne she had done so much to adorn. In an account of his last illness, contributed to the *Nineteenth Century* of July, 1889, Sir Benjamin Kidd, his medical adviser, told how, after the London season, he used to live very quietly at Hughenden, and would walk often in the grounds, admiring the German forest and "the beautiful shrubs and trees on the terrace, most of them with a history, one planted by this friend and one by that. He delighted to recall the memories of old friends from trees planted by them." Disraeli told Dr. Kidd the name was suggested by his old friend Lord Lyndhurst. He said on another occasion that Mrs. Disraeli called the wood her pinetum, and that it reminded him much of parts of Bohemia he had visited.

Though skilful in sylvan design, Mrs. Disraeli had a less delicate taste in interior adornment. Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, after a visit to Hughenden, described the drawing-room as a terribly gaudy apartment. Being a man of refined artistic sensibility, he may have been somewhat censorious on a

matter of this kind, but a picture of the room as it was in those days suggests that his criticism was not without warrant. Some time after the death of Lady Beaconsfield, Queen Victoria visited Hughenden, and on her departure expressed a desire to have some pictures of the house and the demesne taken by a local photographer. One of these depicted the drawing-room. It is reproduced here, and to complete the impression of the garishness of the apartment, it need only be added that the wall-paper was of green, dotted with fleur-de-lys. A modern view of the same room is also given, and the comparison requires no comment.

It will be seen that in the early picture a portrait of Lady Beaconsfield hangs over the mantelpiece. In connection with this portrait, Lord Ronald Gower tells a curious story, which can be supplemented by facts embodied in letters from Disraeli published in the authorised biography. Lord Ronald records that he noticed over the mantelpiece in the drawing-room an empty frame, and asked his host why it was there. Disraeli replied: "I had intended her (Lady Beaconsfield's) picture to be put there, but she has never sat for her portrait except to Ross for a miniature, but some day I shall have that copied life-size and placed in that frame." As there were the two por-

The Lady of Hughenden

traits by Chalon and Rochard, already mentioned, there must have been some lapse here, either by speaker or narrator. Lady Beaconsfield died some months after this conversation, and Disraeli commissioned G. F. Middleton to make a painting from Ross's miniature. Though at first disappointed with the artist's work, he found the picture when completed quite satisfactory. Middleton had, he said, succeeded in giving to the countenance "an expression of sweet gravity which was characteristic." Evidently it represents her as she was in middle life.

Most of Ross's miniature work was done between 1830 and 1850, and he painted none after 1856. If, as seems probable, this picture dates from about the middle of that period, it supports the statement once made by Mrs. Duncan Stewart that Mary Anne was, at the time of her marriage to Disraeli, a handsome, imperial-looking woman, though this hardly accords with Disraeli's own description of her, eight years before, as a pretty little woman.



XI. IN SICKNESS AND IN
HEALTH





A FEW vignettes will suffice to exhibit the life led by Mrs. Disraeli during the twenty years following their settlement at Hughenden—a period during which her husband travelled the hard road which led to the fulfilment of their long-cherished aspiration that he should attain the primacy in British politics. One peculiar feature of her conduct during this time is a negative one. Though vastly interested in his Parliamentary achievements, she would never attend a sitting of the House of Commons until she could see him seated on the Treasury bench as Prime Minister. The fact is well attested. The memorable day was March 5th, 1868, and the Speaker, Mr. Denison (Lord Ossington) wrote in his diary: “Mr. Disraeli took his seat as Prime Minister. The Opposition was silent. Below the gangway on the Ministerial side silence. A fair amount of cheers behind the Treasury bench. By no means an unfriendly reception, but certainly not an enthusiastic greeting. It is true that Mrs. Disraeli had never attended a debate in the House of Commons. I have proposed

to her once or twice to come, but she has always declined—said it would make her nervous, and such-like excuses. But on the day on which Mr. Disraeli took his seat as Prime Minister Mrs. Disraeli wrote to beg that she might have a seat. She came, and the day afterwards she told me that she had resolved she would not attend a debate till she could see Mr. Disraeli take his seat as Prime Minister.”

Her chosen part was to cheer and comfort him at home after his labours. Of her efforts in this direction several examples have already been given. Here is another, culled from Sir John Mowbray’s “Seventy Years at Westminster.” Disraeli, he says, when in the House of Commons, was constantly at work, and gave himself little rest. He used to dine late at night, and very sparingly. Once, referring to this hasty dinner and assiduous attendance, Sir John Mowbray said to Lady Beaconsfield he could not understand how her husband kept going. “Ah!” she exclaimed, “but I always have supper for him when he comes home, and lights, lights, plenty of lights; Dizzy always likes lights. And then he tells me everything that has happened in the House, and then I clap him off to bed.”

At Hughenden she was equally assiduous, and her services were no less valuable. When in the autumn

of 1853 she was ill and unable to look after the household affairs, the result was chaos. Her husband told Lord Londonderry that "as she is the soul of my house, managing all my domestic affairs, it is, irrespective of all other considerations, a complete revolution in my life. Everything to me seems to be anarchy."

One of the "other considerations" which Disraeli cannot have excluded from his mind was the serious financial consequences to himself which would be involved in her death—the loss of her income of £4,000 or £5,000 a year and of the town house. And her illnesses were a frequent cause of anxiety to him, as his were to her. While, however, she always tried to conceal her ailments, his own he was rather disposed to exaggerate. In December, 1858, he wrote to Lord Derby about the illness of Bulwer Lytton, whose symptoms were said to be divided between (1) consumption, (2) dropsy, and (3) paralysis. He said: "I have had them all myself often, and twenty-five years ago in an overwhelming degree." He cannot have intended this to be taken literally, but it is true that all his life he suffered from a physical frailty contrasting markedly with his mental vigour and activity. Mr. Buckle says his intimate notes to his wife from the House of

Commons form a constant record of indisposition, and of requests for pills and other remedies and prophylactics. Work in London and repose at Hughenden were what suited him, and his wife used to complain of the effect of the visits they paid to hospitable friends in the country. She told Sir William Fraser that at a country house he was soon bored, and to relieve the ennui would take to eating. "He eats at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The result is that by the end of the third day he becomes dreadfully bilious, and we have to come away." What he chiefly suffered from in his later years was gout, and when relieved of the pain he would joke in his whimsical way about the regimen to which she subjected him. In October, 1870, he declared that he was completely cured of gout by giving up sugar, burgundy, and champagne—"almost as great a surrender as Sedan."

After Mary Anne's illness in 1853, when he wrote the pathetic lament to Lord Londonderry, they spent Christmas at Heron Court, Hampshire, with the Malmesburys, but she was not entirely recovered, and they went to London to consult a physician. On a debilitated frame, she caught the "London Influenza," he also taking it in a less severe form. "We got down to the country as soon as we could,"

he wrote at the end of January, 1854, "but she had been reduced to the last extremity, and though she has wonderfully rallied, at one moment the physicians hardly gave me a hope."

Her most severe illness (before the last) was in 1867. By this time everyone knew of the devotion of Disraeli to his eccentric lady, and sympathy with him was manifested by people of all parties and all classes. Fresh in the public mind was one of the most notable of the many tributes Disraeli paid to his wife. It was on the occasion of their visit to Edinburgh, when they were so delighted with their reception that they danced a jig in their bedroom. They were the guests of Lord Advocate Gordon, and Sir John Skelton, who was invited to meet them, gives a weird impressionist sketch of Mrs. Disraeli and another lady. "Old Lady Ruthven was there," he wrote, "a miraculous old woman. She and Mrs. Disraeli sitting over the fire with their feet in the fender, making between them the funniest pair—the witches in 'Macbeth,' or what you will." The new freeman and his wife had been entertained at a banquet, when the health of Mrs. Disraeli was proposed by Mr. Baillie-Cochrane (Lord Lamington), who made an observation which throws light on the place she occupied in Society when she was yet Mrs.

Lewis. She was, he said, his own dear friend long before Mr. Disraeli knew her. Responding on her behalf, Disraeli said: "I owe to that lady all, I think, I have ever accomplished, because she has supported me by her counsel and consoled me by the sweetness of her mind and disposition."

It was early in November, and Parliament was summoned for the 19th, to sanction the expedition to Abyssinia. On the 15th, a week after their return to town, Mrs. Disraeli was taken ill, and on the 18th her husband, who as Leader of the House of Commons should have presided at the official dinner at the opening of the session, asked Lord Stanley (Foreign Secretary, and son of the Prime Minister) to take his place. It had, he said, been a critical day in his wife's life, but there seemed to be a favourable turn, and he hoped to be in his place on the morrow. He was able to attend the debate on the Address, and, according to Henry Greville, the Opposition refrained from attacking the Government, on account of the dangerous illness of the wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr. Gladstone, speaking on the Address, made a very sympathetic allusion to the domestic anxieties of his rival. Sir Wemyss Reid, in his "Memories," recalls the scene, and says Disraeli was visibly moved. "He suddenly covered his

face with his hands, and one could see that his eyes were filled with tears." Queen Victoria had sent sympathetic inquiries, and in his report to Her Majesty on the debate he said Mr. Gladstone had been very kind and considerate to him, and he was much touched. Thanking the Queen for her gracious kindness in his great sorrow, he said that morning all seemed dark, and he was told to hope no more, but within three hours there was a change, and everything became hopeful.

In the history of this curious pair, the scene changes from impending tragedy to drama with a touch of comedy. The improvement continued, but she was still ill in bed when, at the end of November, Disraeli himself broke down, and had to take to his bed with an acute attack of gout. The sequel is pathetically amusing. The two invalids, from their separate rooms, wrote to each other notes in pencil. She preserved all his, and they were found in a bundle labelled "Notes from dear Dizzy during our illness, when we could not leave our rooms. At the end of the month (December, 1867), we were both quite well." One could wish that hers also had been preserved. Some of them were well worth it, if we may attach any value at all to one of Disraeli's: "You have sent me the most amusing and charming

Mary Anne Disraeli

letter I have ever had. It beats Horace Walpole and Madame de Sévigné." In another he said Grosvenor Gate had become a hospital, but a hospital with her was worth a palace with anyone else. After a week in bed, he wrote: "I have had a sleepless night, and in agony the whole time. . . . My only consolation is that you are better and stronger." On the 14th he was able to write to Lord Derby on the subject of the Clerkenwell explosion the previous day, and by Christmas he was himself again. But her statement that she also was "quite well" was but an example of her habit of making light of her physical frailty. When Disraeli became Prime Minister three months afterwards, and she had to make her appearance in public, there was pride and pleasure in her countenance, but observers noted also unconcealable signs of illness and decay.



XII. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES





DISRAELI'S first experience of office came in February, 1852, when he was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lord Derby's Ministry, with the lead of the House of Commons. Coupling, as ever, his political with his domestic circumstances, the exultant Mary Anne sent him a delicious little note. Addressing it proudly to "The Right Honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer," she exclaimed: "Bless you, my darling, your own devoted wife wishes you joy. I hope you will make as good a Chancellor of the Exchequer as you have been a husband to your affectionate MARY ANNE."

It was for him an anxious moment. He was still detested by some of the Conservative party, and by many tolerated as a disagreeable necessity, though all perforce admitted his genius for politics. Face-tious young Tories described their party, in cricket parlance, as "the Gentlemen of England, with a Player given." But he faced his task with courage, and fulfilled it with diligence, assisted, as ever, by his wife, who took full advantage of the exalted

Mary Anne Disraeli

station he had now attained. Soon after taking office, he told his sister he literally had not time to take his meals; he was going to Lady Derby's first reception, and nowhere else: "but M. Anne is gay and ubiquitous." It was, in anticipation, a description of her activities in the ensuing years. In London, at Hughenden, and in their visits to friends, she was ever at his side, as hostess or guest, and on their holidays she was his helpful companion.

The year 1856 may be taken as typical. During the summer Disraeli had suffered from nervous debility, and at the close of the session he went with his wife to Spa for treatment. The place was lively with fashionable visitors, but the Disraelis kept very much to themselves and had a quiet rest, from which, with the aid of the waters, he received much benefit. They returned to England in September, and after a visit to Mrs. Brydges Willyams at Torquay, spent six or seven weeks quietly at Hughenden "planting, pruning, and almost in perfect solitude." This was followed by another visit to Paris, Napoleon III having expressed a desire to consult his old acquaintance on the relations between England and France. Again the gay lady had a joyous time in the gay city. They dined out eleven days in succession. Their most noteworthy experience was a

1832 Feb 27th

Bless you my darling,
your own happy husband
wife, with your joy
I hope you will make
a good & Christian of
the child. I hope you have
been a husband to your
affectionate Mary Anne

LETTER FROM MARY ANNE DISRAELI TO
BENJAMIN DISRAELI

banquet at the Tuileries, where they sat beside the Emperor and the Empress, and Mary Anne, chatting playfully with His Majesty, rallied him on his boating adventure on the Thames in the days of his exile.

The visit to Torquay was an annual event, arising from the friendship so strangely formed a few years earlier with Mrs. Brydges Willyams, a woman perhaps even more unordinary than Mrs. Disraeli. The two ladies found congeniality in their unbounded admiration of Disraeli, and absolute devotion to his interests. Mrs. Willyams had the additional tie of racial consanguinity. Though both of the Christian faith, they both claimed descent from the ancient Jewish aristocracy of Spain. She was the daughter and heiress of one Abraham Mendez da Costa, and in 1851 was a childless widow, living at Mount Braddon, Torquay. The romantic story of her first acquaintance with the Disraelis must be dismissed here in few words. She seems to have long watched with vivid interest his upward career, and in 1851 wrote asking him to be an executor of her will, intimating that the executors would be residuary legatees. After some hesitation he wrote to say he would be in Devonshire during the recess, and would take the opportunity to call upon her. Whether he

did so or not is doubtful. Certainly she asked him to meet her at the Crystal Palace, and Mr. Froude tells a dramatic tale of how he did so, and she left in his hands a letter which was subsequently found to contain a £1,000 bank-note. Mr. Buckle adduces proof that this account of their meeting may be discredited. The authentic records give no evidence of their having met before 1853. Of course, Disraeli told his wife all about the new friend with whom he was corresponding, and she expressing a desire to make the lady's acquaintance, they paid a visit to Mount Braddon in August, and stayed a week. The twelfth Duke of Somerset, who met Mrs. Willyams a few years later at the house of Sir Lawrence Palk, near Exeter, described her to his wife as a most remarkable person, "a little dark old woman smothered up in a black wig, who is said to be near a hundred, and very rich." She was, in fact, probably between seventy-five and eighty.

The stay at Mount Braddon confirmed the Disraelis and Mrs. Willyams in their liking of each other. She seems never to have visited them, either in London or at Hughenden, but for the next ten years there was a very frequent and intimate correspondence, in which Mary Anne took a share. Disraeli's letters to her were voluminous and entertain-

ing, and when he was too busy to keep her informed of their doings, his wife would do so. When he went out of office in 1859 Mrs. Willyams urged him to take a peerage. On this Mrs. Disraeli's comment was: "He would not, my dear, go to the Upper House for the world, not for many years. He enjoys his fame too much in the Lower House. He could not take the red ribbon without being knighted, and that would be dreadful—to be called Sir B. Disraeli. The Queen is all kindness to Dis. and would give him anything." Mrs. Willyams had apparently suggested an appointment to the Order of the Bath as an alternative to a peerage, and, curiously enough, Queen Victoria seems to have made the same suggestion years afterwards.

Another time Mary Anne wrote to Mrs. Willyams: "Your constant kind and affectionate thoughts of him add much to the happiness of our lives. I never heard him appreciate so highly as yourself anyone, man or woman." Every year they paid a visit to Torquay, staying at an hotel and spending the afternoons and evenings with her. Disraeli's last letter to her, written on November 5th, 1863, closed with the words: "Adieu! We shall soon meet." Within a week of this she died, leaving a fortune of about £40,000, of which more than £30,000

passed to Disraeli as residuary legatee. She expressed a wish to be buried at Hughenden, and a vault was made in the churchyard, where the three friends now lie together.

The legacy brought timely relief to the Disraelis, who were still living beyond their means, despite Mary Anne's frugal care. Interest on debt was a serious drain on the income derived from her jointure and from his books, and his official salary had thus far been but a small item. The financial situation had, however, been substantially improved just before the receipt of the Willyams legacy, through the intervention of Mr. Andrew Montagu. This wealthy Yorkshire squire wished to help the Conservative cause, and was told he could not do so better than by buying up the debts of the leader in the House of Commons, and charging a low rate of interest. The suggestion was adopted. In return for a mortgage on the Hughenden estate, he took over the responsibility for the whole of the debts, and charged only 3 per cent. interest. Disraeli must have been paying usurious interest before, if the estimates he himself made of the effect of the transaction may be depended upon. The figures are surprising. We are told in the official biography that he estimated the increase in his annual income, as the

result of Mr. Montagu's action, in one letter at £4,200, in another at £5,000. At least a portion of the debt was still outstanding when Lady Beaconsfield died, for in consideration of the pecuniary loss this meant to Disraeli, Mr. Montagu reduced the rate of interest to 2 per cent.

Mr. Buckle says Disraeli's gross income in 1866 appears to have been nearly £9,000 a year. With this he and his wife were able to maintain the position they had now assumed in Society. Some of their entertainments must have been very expensive. In 1860 Mrs. Disraeli gave "a great morning fête" in London in honour of the Queen's review of Volunteers in Hyde Park, and invited 700 members of the "beau monde." At Hughenden Disraeli had become a county magnate, and sometimes they would have the house full of visitors. When they entertained Bishop Wilberforce in 1850, for the triennial visitation, they had what Disraeli described as a great episcopal reception, the house brimful, with Lord and Lady Malmesbury, and other notable people. Three years later Lord Malmesbury was again at Hughenden with the Duke and Duchess of Wellington and others, and a note in his diary shows how the hostess used to keep her house in order. The dinner, he says, was very gay, but the evening

was short, Mrs. Disraeli sending them all off to bed at half-past ten.

When her husband attended political demonstrations in the country she would accompany him, and they would take the opportunity to pay a round of visits. On one such occasion, when Disraeli addressed meetings at Liverpool and Manchester, they stayed with Lord Derby at Knowsley and with Lord Wilton at Heaton Park. Sir Stafford Northcote was one of the party that went from London, and a letter from him to his wife gives us a glimpse of Mary Anne as she appeared at the age of sixty-seven.

"Mrs. Disraeli," Sir Stafford wrote, "is great fun, and we made capital friends in the train, though I could not help occasionally pitying her husband, for the startling effect her natural speeches must have on the ears of his great friends. Still, there is something very warm and good in her manner, which makes one forgive a few oddities." She told him she was born at Brampford Speke, near his home, and he said she must come to see her birthplace some time when in Devonshire. Evidently some of the exclusive people still hesitated to associate closely with her, for Sir Stafford asked his wife what she would say to the idea of asking them to Pynes, adding

Social and Political Activities

that "it would complete the astonishment of our neighbours." Lady Northcote gave her assent, and the Disraelis paid a visit to Pynes before returning to London.

Many of the letters of Disraeli to Mrs. Willyams, printed in the official biography, shed light on the social activities of his wife, as well as on his own political achievements. One dated July 23rd, 1860, may be taken as an example. An exhausting session was drawing to a close. Gladstone was Chancellor of the Exchequer, Disraeli Leader of the Opposition. The long duel between the great protagonists had commenced. The House kept late hours, sitting sometimes till four in the morning. Disraeli often kept at his post to the end. Thanks to the domestic solicitude, he got his usual quantum of sleep, but rising at noon and having to be in the House in the afternoon, he had little time for diversion. "It has," he told Mrs. Willyams, "been a very gay and brilliant season; at least Mrs. Disraeli tells me so, for I never go anywhere, except Wednesdays off and Saturdays. I went, however, to two fêtes on Thursday and Friday last, which amused me." Then he goes on to describe one at Chesham House, given by the Russian Ambassador, Baron Brunnow, where there were "a dozen servants in scarlet liveries, who never left

the entrance hall, and ushering you to one of the finest and most fantastical staircases in London, reaching to the roof of the house, and full of painted and gilded galleries. All the other attendants, who swarmed, were in Court dresses and wore swords." They witnessed a very different scene when they attended a reception given by Lady Palmerston, "whose crowded saloons at Cambridge House were fuller even than usual, for she had invited all the deputies of the Statistical Congress, a body of men who, for their hideousness, the ladies declare were never equalled: I confess myself to a strange gathering of men with bald heads, and all wearing spectacles. You associate these traits often with learning and profundity, but when one sees 100 bald heads and 100 pairs of spectacles the illusion, or the effect, is impaired."

Turning the eyes from the gay and ubiquitous lady moving among the courtly gentlemen and grandes dames of these festive assemblies, we see her disporting herself in the pleasant meads of Buckinghamshire. A writer in the *New Century Review* of September, 1899—a lady, no doubt—sketched her as she appeared at a treat given to schoolchildren at Hughenden about the year 1860: "It was in this decade that the crinoline flourished,

and Mrs. Disraeli wore over hers a petticoat of fine cambric, with innumerable little flounces exquisitely goffered. I remember making a mental calculation of how many hours it would take her blanchisseuse to goffer those flounces, and I came to the conclusion that it could not have been manipulated in eight or nine. Over the petticoat was looped a white dress of delicate French muslin, powdered with purple pansies. The crinoline showed the long dress and petticoat to advantage, as well as the youthful-looking figure, whose head was crowned with a simple white straw hat, trimmed with a band of black velvet. People said she was twenty-five years older than her husband, but as she skipped and ran about with the children she did not look a day over forty." The writer adds that Mr. Disraeli watched with an amused delight, and unconcealed admiration, his wife's efforts to amuse the children.

At one of these treats to children in the grounds of Hughenden Lady Battersea happened to be present. She tells how Mrs. Disraeli received her little guests with much effusiveness, and her husband started the children on their races by blowing on a penny trumpet, to the delight of the onlookers. She remembered the cheers of the assembled villagers, and the banner bearing the words "For Church and

Mary Anne Disraeli

State," hanging over the small platform where the prizes were distributed. "A strange mixture," she says, "of old-fashioned English village life, with its Conservative colouring, and its presiding genius a man of marked Oriental lineage and bearing."



XIII. ROYAL FAVOUR





IT was about this time that Queen Victoria began to take Mary Anne into her favour. For some years she had manifested a growing regard for Disraeli, a regard which was in later years to increase in warmth until it became what it is no exaggeration to describe as affection. During his rise to fame she had shared the general dislike of his manner and distrust of his motive. When in February, 1851, Lord Stanley (shortly to become Earl of Derby) made his abortive attempt to form a Ministry, and proposed to Her Majesty that Disraeli should be Leader of the House of Commons, she at first demurred, and consented with reluctance. She especially resented his rough treatment of "poor Sir Robert Peel," who had died in the preceding June. On the formation of Lord Derby's Government in 1852, the Queen made no difficulties about Disraeli's appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader in the Commons. Taking advantage of his contact with the Crown as Minister, he soon impressed Her Majesty with the magnetism of his

Mary Anne Disraeli

personality. She found novelty in the manner of his approach. His nightly reports from the House of Commons pleased and amused her. Evidently she had read his books, for she said his reports were much in the same style. In different fashion, he took pains to conciliate the Prince Consort, and in November he received his first invitation to stay at Windsor. But Mary Anne did not accompany him; nine years were to elapse before she was received as a guest at the Castle. This was in January, 1861, and her husband being then out of office, there was some comment on the unusual favour shown to a Leader of the Opposition, for even Cabinet Ministers were often invited without their wives. Disraeli told Lord Derby after the visit that the Queen and the Prince were very gracious and very communicative. On the death of the Prince at the end of the same year, the Queen's regard for Disraeli was further enhanced by his glowing eulogies. She told several people that he was the only man who really appreciated her husband.

This, however, is not the place to consider the relations between Disraeli and his Sovereign, except so far as these affected directly the career of his wife. The marriage of the Prince of Wales in March, 1863, gave Her Majesty an opportunity to exhibit

conspicuously her feeling towards them. Disraeli left a memorandum describing their experiences on this occasion. The ceremony was to take place in St. George's Chapel, at Windsor Castle, where there would be room for only a few of the Queen's private friends when accommodation had been found for all the Royalties and official persons who would be present. Consequently there was keen competition among the ladies of high Society to procure invitations. When the list was finally submitted to Her Majesty, there were only four places not appropriated, and she directed that they should be given to Lord and Lady de la Warr and Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli. Some objection was made by the Court officials, but the Queen persisted in her decision. On this becoming known, Disraeli doubtless preserved his usual aspect of imperturbability, but the flouting of the exalted dames who regarded Mary Anne with a somewhat contumelious condescension, filled him with the joy of triumph, as we can see from the terms of his private record. "There is," he wrote, "no language which can describe the rage, envy, and indignation of the great world. The Duchess of Marlborough went into hysterics of mortification at the sight of my wife, who was on terms of considerable intimacy with her, and said it was really

shameful, after the reception the Duke had given the Prince of Wales at Blenheim; and as for the Duchess of Manchester, who had been Mistress of the Robes in Lord Derby's Administration, she positively passed me for the season without recognition."

During the ceremony he caught the Queen's eye, and thought "she was looking to see who was there, and triumphing a little in the decided manner in which she had testified her gratitude"—gratitude, that is to say, for his appreciation of Prince Albert. The pair do not figure conspicuously in the picture of the ceremony which W. P. Firth was commissioned by the Queen to paint, and if Mary Anne was not offended by this the artist evidently feared she would be. He says in his reminiscences that when she went to his studio to see the picture while it was unfinished, he made some excuse for not showing it to her, for the portrait of her husband was no larger than a shilling. After the wedding there was a rush and a crush for the train to London. Mr. Disraeli rescued several gorgeously-dressed ladies who had got separated from their husbands and put them in a crowded carriage, where he had to sit on his wife's knees. Lord Malmesbury mentions in his diary that the Duchess of Westminster, who wore a million's

worth of jewels, could only find a place in a third-class carriage.

The London season following the Royal wedding was marked by brilliant Society functions, in many of which Mrs. Disraeli participated. Glowing accounts of them were sent to Mrs. Willyams, and in these and other descriptions of their doings Disraeli entertained the old lady—then nearing her end—with some passages worthy of the author of “The Young Duke.” On June 25th he told her that next day the Brigade of Guards were to give to the Princess of Wales “the most gorgeous ball ever produced in any age or any country.” His wife, he said, would be there, and he would be if possible. He was himself intent on consolidating his position as Conservative leader, and gave at Grosvenor Gate a series of dinners to his friends in the Lords and Commons. At the same time, he was raising still higher the estimation in which he was held at Court. His speech in the House of Commons on the erection of a memorial to the Prince Consort so pleased Her Majesty that she sent him a volume of the Prince’s speeches, with a letter saying she had shed many tears over his tribute to her “adored, beloved, and great husband,” and it was soothing to her

broken heart to see such true appreciation of that "spotless and unequalled character."

After the disappointing General Election of 1865, Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli visited the Duke and Duchess of Cleveland at Raby Castle. There they met the young Lord Dalmeny (afterwards Earl of Rosebery) and his younger brother, sons of the Duchess, one of whom was impressed by the girlish manner of the aging Mary Anne. They also met for the first time Mr. Montagu Corry, who soon afterwards began that career as Disraeli's confidential secretary which led ultimately to the conferment on him of a peerage, as Lord Rowton. Of his association with Mrs. Disraeli there is little to say, but note may be made of a tribute he paid to her courage during the Reform demonstrations in London in 1866, when the mob broke down the railings of Hyde Park. Grosvenor Gate was near the centre of the disturbances, and Mr. Corry was left there to look after Mrs. Disraeli while her husband was at the House of Commons. When the riots abated, he sent a message to Disraeli assuring him that the danger was past, and added: "Mrs. Disraeli wishes me to add that the people in general seem to be thoroughly enjoying themselves, and I really believe she sympathises with them. At any rate, I

am glad to say she is not the least alarmed." It was in the following year that they paid the visit to Edinburgh, which seems to have exhausted the old lady, and brought on the serious illness to which allusion has already been made.

While they were both laid up at Grosvenor Gate, in December, 1867, Lord Derby was also suffering from a severe attack of gout, and it had become evident that he could not much longer fulfil the duties of Prime Minister. Though we can see that Disraeli was again "the inevitable," some doubt was felt of his succession to the Premiership. But the Queen put an end to any dubiety he may have had as to what her choice would be on a vacancy occurring. In January she summoned him to Windsor, and on the 25th he wrote to his wife: "The most successful visit I have ever had; all that I could wish or hope"—a clear intimation that she intended to make him Prime Minister. In February Lord Derby informed Her Majesty that he could no longer delay his retirement, and Disraeli reached, as he expressed it to a friend, the top of the greasy pole.

Writing to his successor wishing him well, Lord Derby did not forget the happy wife. "Before concluding," he said, "let me beg of you to offer my congratulations to Mrs. Disraeli upon your having

attained a post your fitness for which she will not be inclined to dispute." Indeed, she was not! In a hurried note to her friend Lady de Rothschild on February 25th, she said: "By the time this reaches you Dizzy will be Prime Minister of England! Lord Stanley is to announce this in the House of Commons to-day." But there was a note of sadness in her exultation. Mr. Sichel quotes her as having said to a friend: "You don't know my Dizzy, what great plans he has long matured for the good and greatness of England. But they have made him wait and drudge so long! And now time is against him." She did not, alas! live to see the full realisation of their aspirations. Sir Horace Rumbold relates that at Disraeli's investiture as an Earl a sob was heard among the people assembled. It was the grief of an old and faithful servant, sighing, "Ah! if only *she* had lived to see him now!"

Nevertheless, she had lived to see him the first Minister of the Crown, and found herself in a roseate atmosphere of public notice and felicitation. Despite physical infirmities, she rose to the occasion with characteristic resolution. The new Prime Minister was told by the Government Whips that his accession to power ought to be marked by some festivities on an extensive scale. He was nothing loth, and the

Royal Favour

official house in Downing Street being considered "dingy and decaying," he asked Lord Stanley to lend him the rooms of the Foreign Office for a grand reception by his wife. It was held on March 26th, and though the night was stormy, there was a great gathering of leading people in politics and Society. The Prince and Princess of Wales were there, and Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone were among the Liberals who accepted invitations. The host and hostess were the subjects of a quizzical interest. Bishop Wilberforce, one of the guests, wrote in his diary of "Dizzy in his glory leading about the Princess of Wales, the Prince of Wales Mrs. Dizzy"; but he was constrained to add: "she looking very ill and haggard."

The Premiership lasted but nine months, and during this time Mary Anne, keeping fairly well, basked in the sunshine of her husband's high station. Proudly she rode in "a new carriage with two footmen," as Lord Houghton observed. Queen Victoria began at this time the practice of sending flowers to her favourite Minister and his wife, and a letter of Mrs. Disraeli's which has been preserved is an acknowledgment of a present of spring flowers sent to her by Princess Christian on behalf of the Queen "to make his rooms look bright." One suspects, however, that the very Disraelian touch in the

composition was not entirely her own. "I performed," she said, "the most pleasing office which I ever had to fulfil in obeying Her Majesty's command. Mr. Disraeli is passionately fond of flowers, and their lustre and fragrance were enhanced by the condescending hand which had showered upon him all the treasures of spring."

The Queen went to Lucerne in August, and on her return in September invited Disraeli to Balmoral for ten days. Going as "Minister in attendance," he was not accompanied by his wife, but she prepared him for his journey with her customary solicitude. Reaching Perth after a night in the railway train, he wrote her that she had provided him so admirably and judiciously that he had two superfluous meals—a partridge breakfast and a chicken and tongue dinner, and plenty of good wine. During his stay at Balmoral they wrote each other almost daily, their correspondence being marked by the same fervour as that of the lovers had been thirty years before. For example: "Adieu, with a thousand embraces, my dearest, dearest wife." The Queen was most gracious, said many kind things about Mrs. Disraeli, and sent her a Scotch shawl, hoping she would find it a comfort in the cold weather.



XIV. VISCOUNTESS BEACONSFIELD





QUEEN VICTORIA'S favour was put to the test when the Disraeli Administration was brought to an end by the reverse at the elections in November. The only incident associated with the break-up of the Government with which we are here concerned is the conferment of a peerage on Mary Anne Disraeli. The facts attending the grant of the honour were not fully known until the publication in 1926 of the Second Series of the Letters of Queen Victoria. From documents then made public it is clear that the Queen—so far from suggesting to Disraeli this mark of her esteem, as stated in some of the earlier biographies—had some hesitation about complying with the request when it came from him. She took a strict view of her Constitutional duty as the "source of honour," and had declined to sanction a proposal made by Disraeli before the election that he might at that stage be permitted to submit to her the names of certain personages on whom he wished honours to be conferred. When, however, he was retiring from office it was in accordance with the

usual practice that he should make recommendations of this kind. He could, of course, have had a peerage for himself, and it was with some surprise that Her Majesty learned that he would prefer that the honour should be paid to his wife.

The suggestion was made in the course of an interview he had with the Queen as soon as the results of the elections were known. The new situation was discussed, and she expressed a desire that he should continue to guide the Conservative party. He consented to do so, and she requested him to put in writing the substance of their conversation. In this memorandum he said it had been his original intention to terminate his political career, and to solicit Her Majesty to bestow upon him some mark of her favour not unusual in the circumstances. He had, however, decided to continue to serve Her Majesty as Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons. "But," he added, "next to your Majesty there is one to whom he owes everything, and who has looked forward to this period of their long united lives as one of comparative repose and of recognised honour. Might Mr. Disraeli therefore, after thirty-one years of Parliamentary toil, and after having served your Majesty on more than one occasion, if not with prolonged success at least

Viscountess Beaconsfield

with unfaltering devotion, humbly solicit your Majesty to grant those honours to his wife which perhaps under ordinary circumstances your Majesty would have deigned to bestow on him?"

Probably she had asked him, when the proposal was made verbally, if there was precedent for this. In his memorandum he said no precedents were necessary for such a course, but he reminded her that when the friends of the elder Pitt desired him, on the formation of an Administration, to remain in the House of Commons, his wife was created a peeress as Baroness Chatham, and that Queen Victoria herself had made the wife of Sir John Campbell Baroness Stratheden when Lord Melbourne wished Sir John to remain in the House of Commons as Attorney-General. Throwing himself on the gracious indulgence and condescending sympathy of Her Majesty, he concluded: "Mrs. Disraeli has a fortune of her own adequate to any position in which your Majesty might deign to put her. Might her husband then hope that your Majesty would be graciously pleased to create her Viscountess Beaconsfield, a town with which Mr. Disraeli has been long connected and which is the nearest town to his estate in Bucks which is not yet ennobled?"

In the meantime, the Queen had communicated

the proposal to General Grey, her confidential private secretary, and asked him to give her in writing his opinion on the subject. General Grey was the gentleman who successfully opposed Disraeli at Wycombe, when he made his first attempt to enter Parliament in 1832. He would have been not a little astonished had he been told then the circumstances in which the affairs of the fantastic young gentleman were to come under his attention thirty-six years later. His memorandum to Her Majesty bears the same date as that of Disraeli, and the opening sentence shows at least that she did not embrace with enthusiasm the idea of making Mrs. Disraeli a peeress. She seems, indeed, to have suggested to General Grey the alternative of giving to the retiring Minister the Grand Cross of the Bath, since he did not want to go to the House of Lords. This would have made him Sir Benjamin and his wife Lady Disraeli, and one recalls the answer made by Mary Anne to Mrs. Willyams when she made a similar suggestion. General Grey, in his memorandum, wrote:

“This is indeed, as your Majesty says, very embarrassing, and General Grey can quite understand your Majesty’s feeling in the desire to do what would gratify Mr. Disraeli, who certainly deserves it at

your Majesty's hand, and yet not to oppose him to attacks, and even ridicule, which would surely follow the creation of Mrs. Disraeli as a peeress in her own right, which is evidently the object to which he alluded. . . . The Bath is not an honour in which she could share, further than that it would make him Sir Benjamin and her Lady Disraeli. It is what could not be objected to if he would be satisfied with it; but he has evidently had the peerage either for himself or Mrs. Disraeli in view, and if General Grey ventures to doubt the expediency of the latter, at all events it is really more from the belief that it would not be a kindness to Mrs. Disraeli to subject her to what would be made a subject of endless ridicule." But he hardly liked to advise the Queen to refuse, and concluded: "On the whole, then, though with much doubt and diffidence, General Grey is inclined to think your Majesty will be better pleased to comply with his wishes than to refuse them, and would therefore venture to advise your Majesty to follow the dictates of your Majesty's own heart."

The advice was accepted. Though the Queen evidently shared the qualms of her secretary, her heart dictated the following letter, which she wrote to Disraeli the next day:

“The Queen has received Mr. Disraeli’s letter, and has much pleasure in complying with his request that she should confer a peerage on Mrs. Disraeli as a mark of her sense of his services. . . . The Queen can indeed truly sympathise with his devotion to Mrs. Disraeli, who in her turn is so deeply attached to him, and she hopes they may yet enjoy many years of happiness together. The Queen will gladly confer the title of Viscountess Beaconsfield on Mrs. Disraeli.” She concluded by expressing her appreciation of his great kindness to her, sentiments which were effusively echoed in his letter of acknowledgment.

The Cabinet had not yet acquiesced in the Prime Minister’s wish to resign without meeting Parliament—a new precedent—but a few days later he overcame the objections of some of the members, and on December 3rd the newspapers announced the resignation of the Government and the creation of Viscountess Beaconsfield. The announcement excited surprise, but less ridicule than was expected at Windsor. As Mr. Buckle says, there was some ill-mannered comment in the Radical Press, but public opinion in general accepted Mrs. Disraeli’s peerage as a graceful and appropriate recognition of her husband’s eminence and her own devotion. This general

Viscountess Beaconsfield

opinion found expression, if somewhat crudely, in the pages of *Punch*, where the following lines were addressed "To Mrs. Disraeli":

Lady of Hughenden, Punch, drawing near,
Affably offers a homage sincere.
Deign to accept it—though playful its tone,
Your heart will tell you it comes from his own.
Battle full oft with your lord he has done,
Ever in fairness and often in fun,
Adding, as friends and antagonists know,
Cheer, when his enemy struck a good blow.
Opportune moment he finds, nothing loth,
Now for a tribute more pleasant to both.
Smile on the circlet a husband prepares
For his guide to the triumph she honours and shares:
In it acknowledged what ne'er can be paid,
Earnest devotion and womanly aid.
Long may the gems of that coronet flame.
Decking her brow who's more proud of his fame.

A friendly note of congratulation came from the rival who had at the elections so signally triumphed over the Conservative leader. Concluding a letter relating to the Speakership, Mr. Gladstone said: "I also beg of you to present my best compliments on her coming patent to (I suppose I must still say, and never can use the name for the last time without

regret) Mrs. Disraeli." From Disraeli's old chief came a note which seems studiously to emphasise the reflective character of the Royal favour, but the lady herself perceived that the peerage was an acknowledgment of her husband's services rather than of any merits of her own. She made a point of this in a letter to the Duchess of Northumberland, here reproduced in facsimile, from which it will be noticed that though less than a week had elapsed since the announcement of her elevation, she was already writing on note-paper bearing the initial "B." surmounted by the coronet of a Viscountess. Lord Derby wrote: "Pray let me be among the first to congratulate Lady Beaconsfield on her new honour. She will, I am sure, receive it as a graceful acknowledgment, on the part of the Crown, of *your* public services, unaccompanied by the drawback of removing you from the House in which (*pace* Sir R. Knightley) your presence is indispensable."

Sir Rainald Knightley of Fawsley was a prominent representative of the high Tory school which had always looked askance at Disraeli, and in this hour of his defeat would have rejoiced to see him relinquish the leadership and retire to the House of Lords. By this section of the party the arrangement made with the Queen was regarded as another speci-

B

Ex-10-111
Grosvenor Gate.

Dear Duchess of Northumberland

I thank you

very much for your

kind words and

interest in all I write

and I am sure you

10

will continue to be

very kind to me

in all I write

and I am sure you

will continue to be

very kind to me

and I am sure you

will continue to be

very kind to me

in all I write

and I am sure you

will continue to be

very kind to me

and I am sure you

will continue to be

LETTER FROM MARY ANNE DISRAELI TO DUCHESS OF NORTHUMBERLAND

men of the upstart's wizardry, and Sir Rainald's opinion of it was probably that of the lady (Miss Bowater) who shortly afterwards became Lady Knightley. In her journal she wrote on December 4th: "That artful dodger Dizzy has got his wife made Viscountess Beaconsfield, so he keeps power and she gains rank"; adding, with a touch of irony, "I really give him great credit!" A few months previously she had recorded in her journal a conversation between Lady Alice Peel and Lady Salisbury, who discussed whether or not they should speak to Mrs. Disraeli at a Drawing Room.

It has been stated that Disraeli desired another title for his wife, and had to waive the claim on objection being taken. As to this Mr. Swift McNeill made the conjecture that the title coveted was "Temple," associated as it was with his early "love story," and that the objection was that two peerages with that title were already in existence. This suggestion is negatived by the fact, now known, that Beaconsfield was the name submitted to the Queen while the matter was still a profound secret. Burke, who resided at Beaconsfield, chose the title for the peerage it was intended to bestow upon him when he retired from the House of Commons, and whether or not Disraeli intended ultimately to take it for himself,

the name had long been in his mind. Among the personages in his earliest novel, "Vivian Grey," are a Lord and Lady Beaconsfield, who were guests at Château Désir.

When the title was adopted there was some doubt as to the pronunciation of the word. In old maps the little Bucks town is alluded to as Beconsfield or Bekonsfield, the derivation being from beeches, not beacons, but Mr. Meynell records that once when Lord Rosebery so expressed it in the presence of Lady Beaconsfield, her husband corrected him, the lady joining in. "I was impressed," Lord Rosebery said long afterwards, "by those persons with a creed which will leave me only with life, that the pronunciation is Beeconsfield, and it would afterwards have required more courage than I possess to address the lady as Beconsfield or her husband as Lord Beconsfield."

Apropos, it may be permissible here to allude also to the pronunciation of Disraeli, on which Mr. Meynell has an interesting paragraph. When Mr. Disraeli stood for Maidstone in 1837, he dictated his address to the editor of the local paper, who asked how his name should be spelt. "Oh, knock out the apostrophe," he replied; "it looks foreign. Write my name in one word." At the hustings a few days



LADY BEACONSFIELD'S COAT OF ARMS

later the proposer of Colonel Perronet Thompson, mentioning his opponent, said sneeringly: "Mr. Disraeli—I hope I pronounce his name aright." The colonel also, as it happened, had a name of doubtful sound, and in his speech Disraeli was able to retort: "Colonel Perronet Thompson—I hope I pronounce his name aright." Mr. Meynell says that in after years the softened sound of Israel, incorporated into Disraeli, was seldom heard. Disraeli was thumped forth, rhyming, say, with the name of his one-time secretary, Daly, but many older-fashioned people made up for this quickening sound by an undue prolongation, Disraee-li; some of them unwittingly, some to underscore the alien. Speaker Peel inherited the habit from his father, and calling once upon Mr. Coningsby Disraee-li, surprised Mr. Healy to his feet. The ambiguity had been felt from Disraeli's earliest years. At his first school the master solved or eluded the difficulty by using "Is he really."

The coat of arms designed by the Heralds' College for Lady Beaconsfield symbolised primarily her maternal descent. Its central and most conspicuous feature is a slip of vine argent, fructed and leaved proper (for Viney), between two flaunches sable, each charged with a boar's head erased of the field

Mary Anne Disraeli

(for Evans), with supporters an eagle and a lion or, each gorged with a collar gules, holding pendent an escutcheon charged with a castle argent. The castle or tower was her marital symbol. It appears much more prominently in the arms assumed by Disraeli when he became Earl of Beaconsfield, and is taken to indicate his descent from the ancient family of Mendizebel, who bore that cognisance. Bunches of grapes, in a different setting, are prominently shown also on the Viney arms in the family vault in Gloucester Cathedral. The memorial stones have peeled, and are almost indecipherable, but on one of them the family arms remain almost intact.



XV. THE FIGHT AGAINST DEATH





WHEN Mary Anne was created Viscountess she had just completed her seventy-sixth year. No Englishwoman of an age so advanced had ever before been made a peeress in her own right. Sanguine though she always was in her earlier years, she could hardly have anticipated the day when she would wear the coronet of a Viscountess and take rank with the peers of the United Kingdom. Yet the prevailing note in the record of the four years in which she possessed that dignity is one of sadness. When her end came carcinoma was certified as one of the causes of death, and there can be little doubt that the fatal cancer already had her in its grip when the high honour came to her.

But she bore all her sufferings like a Spartan, and made gallant efforts to be still gay and ubiquitous. According to the friend who wrote *The Times* biography, her one thought to the last was to spare her husband. "Surprised by a sudden flow of blood from an incurable cancer, knowing that her doom was certain, and that their happy wedded life was fast

drawing to its end, she had the touching resolution to preserve her secret; while, all the time knowing it as well as she, he never for a moment suffered her to guess his knowledge, or gave her the grief of seeing him suffer." Exactly what period is here referred to is uncertain, but there is collateral evidence of the fact. On his release from office, Disraeli returned to literary work. He had published no fiction since "Tancred" appeared in 1847, and he now began "Lothair." It is said that he wrote it to please his invalid wife, and every evening read to her the portion he had written during the day. None of his friends knew he was engaged on a novel, not even Montagu Corry, until the announcement of its impending publication appeared in the spring of 1870.

After his retirement he spent most of his spare time at Hughenden with his wife. She was well enough in the autumn of 1869 to join him in visits to the Earl of Shrewsbury at Alton Towers, the Duke of Somerset at Bulstrode, the Duke of Wellington at Strathfieldsaye, and the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim. They were at Hughenden in November, when his old friend Lord Derby died, and in the following month the new Earl of Derby came there to discuss with Disraeli a proposal that he should succeed his father as Conservative leader in the

The Fight Against Death

House of Lords. They were to have joined another party at Strathfieldsaye in December, but had to break the engagement. This was a disappointment to Monckton Milnes, one of the guests, who told his wife things were very dull. Using the phrase employed by Sir Stafford Northcote ten years before, he said it would have been great fun if the Disraelis had been there. Disraeli sent the excuse that his brother was dying, "which," said Milnes, "nobody believes." It was true, nevertheless. James Disraeli died the same month, and was buried at Hughenden by the side of Mrs. Willyams. He had been for some time a Commissioner of Excise, and his brother Benjamin inherited from him about £5,000.

Two letters of congratulation written by Disraeli in 1870 are worthy of note, on account of Mary Anne's association with them. The first was to the new Lord Derby on his engagement to the widow of the second Marquess of Salisbury. It concluded: "Lady Beaconsfield sends you her congratulations through her tears—of joy." There was little in the match to draw the sentimental tear, but the joy might be justified if Lady Beaconsfield could have foreseen that the alliance was to be a few years later a political link of some value to her husband.

Mary Anne Disraeli

Lord Derby became stepfather to the third Marquess of Salisbury (the future Prime Minister), who was at this time bitterly hostile to Disraeli. When Disraeli was forming his Ministry after his electoral triumph in 1874, he was anxious to obtain the services of Lord Salisbury, but they were not on speaking terms. He therefore got "My Lady" (as the children of the second Marquess always called their mother after her re-marriage) to act as intermediary. It was a delicate business, but an interview was at last arranged, and Lord Salisbury became Secretary for India, to succeed his stepfather later as Foreign Secretary, and to become eventually successor of Lord Beaconsfield in the leadership of the Conservative party.

The second letter of congratulation was to the Queen, who wrote to Disraeli in August, through Lady Ely, telling him of the betrothal of Princess Louise to the Marquess of Lorne. In the memoirs of Lord Lorne's father, the Duke of Argyll ("Passages from the Past"), Disraeli is represented as having said in this letter: "Lady Disraeli thanks your Majesty for your gracious inquiry after her. She is, I am happy to say, quite well, and singularly interested in Lady Ely's communication." It is inconceivable that he should have lapsed into such an

The Fight Against Death

error in the description of his wife, and scarcely less strange that the mistake should have been made, as probably it was, in taking a copy of the letter by or for Princess Louise. There are some verbal differences in the version printed in the official biography, where the name is given correctly. As an example of the method Disraeli had now acquired of addressing his Sovereign, one cannot refrain from adding his oblique reference to the fact that the Princess was not marrying a foreigner. The pang of her absence from the accustomed scene would, he said, "soften under the recollection that she is near you, and by the spell of frequent intercourse. You will miss her, Madam, only like the stars that return in their constant season and with all their brightness." A few weeks later Lord Lorne received the personal felicitations of the Disraelis at Hughenden.

It will be observed that Disraeli at this time declared his wife to be quite well. She was evidently, however, getting very frail, and they were spending the autumn quietly at home, accepting very few invitations. A year later, in September, 1871, he appears again to have tried to reassure himself on the subject of his wife's health. *Miladi*, he said, was very well indeed, but he said also they had not left Hughenden for a moment. With December came

Mary Anne Disraeli

severe weather, which prevented Lady Beaconsfield from getting out, and they went to London for the rest of the winter.

At this time the claim to the Tichborne estates was being fought out, and she followed day by day the varying aspects of the trial. Doubtless she shared the definite opinion her husband formed long before the jury gave their verdict. Sir John Duke Coleridge (afterwards Lord Chief Justice), the leading counsel for the Tichborne family, sent to Grosvenor Gate a portrait of the claimant. Acknowledging the present, Disraeli described the claimant as the most infamous impostor since Titus Oates, and said he had given the portrait to her ladyship, "who takes so keen an interest in the question." Among the diversions with which he sought to entertain her during this winter was a visit to Drury Lane for the pantomime. They went with the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury and their children, and greatly enjoyed the delight of the young Talbots. Disraeli said he had not been to a pantomime for thirty years.

This was in January, 1872, and his political fortunes were once more in the balance. A strong movement was being made to displace him from the leadership, and his wife shared his anxieties. But she was again to share his triumphs. These came in the

The Fight Against Death

shape of two demonstrations of his popularity which were regarded as giving emphatic endorsement to his position as head of his party. The first was in February, on the occasion of the thanksgiving service at St. Paul's for the recovery of the Prince of Wales from typhoid fever. There was a spectacular procession through London of the principal people of the day, and so vehement was the applause as the carriage of Mr. Disraeli and his lady passed, as compared with the rather cool reception of Mr. Gladstone, that everyone assumed he would soon again be Prime Minister.

This, it is true, was only what London thought, but the impression was confirmed when he went to Manchester at the beginning of April, and had an impressive manifestation of his popularity in Lancashire, where opinion is supposed to anticipate that of England. There again his wife bore him company, and passed heroically through an ordeal manifestly excessive for a delicate lady in her eightieth year. There was a vast assemblage at the Pomona Gardens in the afternoon, when representatives of between 200 and 300 Conservative Associations of the north paraded before their carriage, cheering and waving flags. In the evening he delivered a brilliant speech, lasting over three hours, at the Free Trade

Mary Anne Disraeli

Hall. Lady Beaconsfield sat in a gallery, and one who was on the platform said that next to the interest of the great speech of the evening was the sympathetic face of the orator's wife, and the way in which from time to time he turned his face to her as if to ask for her approval. The enthusiasm and excitement of the meeting seem to have overwhelmed the old lady. They were staying in Victoria Park, with Mr. Romaine Callender, leader of the Conservative party in Manchester. Mr. Cecil Raikes records that after the meeting she returned first to their host's house, and when the carriage bringing her husband was heard on the drive, she hurried from the drawing-room, met him in the hall, and, rushing into his arms, exclaimed: "Oh! Dizzy, Dizzy, it is the greatest night of all. This pays for all!"

She had overtaxed her waning strength, and on their return to London she had a serious relapse. It was the beginning of the end. But her resolute spirit was unquenched. She endeavoured to conceal her sufferings, and to maintain her position in Society. When she had to leave a party at Lady Waldergrave's on May 7th, she boasted that her illness had not been found out. Their physician, Sir William Gull, deemed it best to let her have her own way, and by his advice she attended a Court

The Fight Against Death

at Buckingham Palace on the 8th. Disraeli doubted the wisdom of the advice, considering that the physician had not made sufficient allowance for her extreme weakness. His fears were justified. At the Palace she was taken very unwell, and with the help of some female attendants, he got her away without much observation.

He now realised that her end could not be far off. Writing from the Carlton Club on the 14th, he told Mr. Corry there was nothing encouraging at home, and it entirely unmanned him to see her getting weaker and weaker. "For herself," he said, "she still makes an effort to enter Society, and Sir William approves and even counsels it, but it is impossible the effort can be maintained." In the hope that a change from London to the country would be a check to these efforts, he took her to Hughenden for the Whitsuntide recess. But there was no improvement in her condition. "She moves," he wrote, "with great difficulty and cannot bear the slightest roughness in the road, which sadly limits our travels. . . . Antonelli pushes her about in a perambulator a little, and seems to amuse her. He heard a nightingale 'whistling' about the house. She thinks 'whistling' a capital term for bird noises."

After their return to town, she still refused to

Mary Anne Disraeli

acknowledge the hopelessness of her condition, and her husband accompanied her to several functions. One of these was at the Foreign Office, where he was observed assisting her step by step down the long staircase, planting her feet and tenderly supporting her feeble frame. The last social gathering she was able to attend was at the house of the Countess of Loudoun, where she became suddenly ill and had to be taken home. The hostess and guests were struck, Mr. Buckle says, by her wonderful courage, "and, indeed, heroism," and by the unselfishness with which she seemed to think more of the inconvenience her illness might cause her hostess than of her own acute pains.

This was on July 17th, and a week later she had occasion to write a note to Disraeli, who had been detained at the House of Commons. It was the last of her letters he preserved, and Mr. Buckle thinks it was probably the last she ever wrote to him. "My own Dearest," it ran, "I miss you sadly. I feel so grateful for your constant tender love and kindness. I certainly feel better this evening. . . . Your own devoted BEACONSFIELD."

On the rising of the House, he was anxious to get her away to Hughenden, but she could not undertake the journey. The cancer was now developing dan-

The Fight Against Death

gerously. She had more than one return of the internal hæmorrhage. Disraeli told Lord Cairns it tore his heart to see such a spirit suffer, and suffer so much. They stayed in town the whole of August and September, and there was some improvement in her condition. They went frequently for drives in the neighbourhood of London, discovering, as Disraeli said, beautiful retreats of which they had never heard. She boasted that during these two months she had travelled 220 miles. The last week in September they were able to go to their beloved country home, which she was never to leave again. Her principal difficulty had been an almost total inability to take food. At Hughenden there was some revival of appetite, and in answer to sympathetic inquiries from the Queen, Disraeli reported continuous improvement, and dwelt constantly on her buoyant and gallant spirit. October passed without material change, and the doctors advised that if sustenance could be taken no immediate danger need be apprehended. Among friends who came to see her were Lady Anthony de Rothschild and her daughter. Lady Battersea says she could then no longer take pleasure in her woods or her walks. "She was slowly dying, but still full of unselfish courage. She tried to show an interest in everything, and it was pitiful

Mary Anne Disraeli

to see the attempt." She managed to pay a few visits to friends in the neighbourhood, and an indication of her pluck is given incidentally in a letter Disraeli sent to Sir Phillip Rose, explaining that they had not been able to call, as they intended. "The snow frightened me," he said, "though my wife was inclined to face it."

In November they ventured to invite a few friends to Hughenden, and the little party, the last they gave, has become almost historic. It was on this occasion that Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower was one of the guests, and he left an account of it in his "Records and Remembrances." The other guests were Lord and Lady John Manners, Lord Rosebery, and Sir (then Mr.) William Harcourt, though all were not there simultaneously. Lord Ronald says he and Harcourt had rooms at the top of the house, "bright and cheerful, as all rooms seem to be at Hughenden." Arriving on Saturday afternoon, they found Lady Beaconsfield in the library with her husband before dinner. "The poor old lady sadly altered in looks since London—death written in her face—but, as usual, gorgeously dressed." At dinner Disraeli was evidently very anxious about her, and was much depressed. His attention to her was quite touching,

The Fight Against Death

and Mary Anne, as he sometimes called her, was constantly appealed to. She did not appear at breakfast on Sunday morning, and Disraeli said that when alone they had no breakfast. The visitors attended church with their host, and she joined them at lunch. In the afternoon they went for a walk through the German Forest, "My Lady" leading the way in a pony-chaise. Dinner was more cheerful than on Saturday, and the hostess "talked ceaselessly about her pets—her horses and her peacocks." When she had retired, Disraeli spoke very despondingly about her health. "She suffers," he groaned, "so dreadfully at times. We have been married thirty-three years and she has never given me a dull moment." Lord Ronald says it was quite touching to see his distress. "His face, generally so emotionless, was filled with a look of suffering and woe that nothing but the sorrow of her he so truly loves could cause on that impassive countenance."

Next morning she came down after eleven o'clock, having had a bad night. "He, however, seemed much the most distressed of the two, for she was wonderfully brisk and lively, and had her breakfast in the library, where we were." They left at noon, with a conviction that they would never again see "poor old Lady Beaconsfield, who, with many oddities as to

dress and manners, is certainly a most devoted wife and companion."

Harcourt inadvertently took away a French novel she had lent him to read in his bedroom, and in returning it pretended to conjecture that Lord John Manners had put it in his bag to injure his reputation—a whimsical observation which is also suggestive. His letter was written from Trinity College, Cambridge, and he sent her a supply of the celebrated Trinity "audit ale." He had told her in conversation of the wonderful qualities of this beverage, and promised to send her some, though he doubted whether any but a Cambridge man could drink it with impunity. Disraeli told him afterwards that a glass of this ale was almost the last thing that passed her lips before she died.

Reporting to Mr. Corry on the week-end visit, Disraeli said his wife, notwithstanding her sufferings, got over it with "success and great tact, showing little, but always to effect." But it was her last effort. A week later she had by some means contracted congestion of the lungs, and this rendered her case hopeless. A week of acute illness followed. Some particulars of these closing days were gathered by Sir (then Mr.) Henry Lucy, when he attended the funeral. They were entered in his diary, and

The Fight Against Death

published in the *Cornhill Magazine*, January, 1912.

"She used," he said, "to say that people need not die unless they gave way to death, and for her part she never would. She refused to go to bed when her last illness came on, and died in her chair. The post-bag was, during the week preceding the end, daily weighted with letters of inquiry as to the state of her health. The Queen telegraphed three times to know how the Viscountess fared. Only the first message was shown to her Ladyship. She was sitting by the fire when the gracious inquiry was triumphantly brought in. 'What is it? What is it?' she testily asked. 'A message from Her Majesty to know how your Ladyship is this morning.' 'Bah!' said her Ladyship, picking up a spoon from the table by her side and throwing it at the innocent telegram form."

The narrative shows that as the end approached her mentality was disturbed and there is further evidence of this in a brief note which her husband, who scarcely left her room during this last week, sent out to Mr. Corry: "She says she must see you. Calm, but the delusions stronger than ever. She will not let me go out to fetch you. Come. D." She died at noon on Sunday, December 15th.

The certificate of death recorded that Mary Anne

Mary Anne Disraeli

Disraeli, Viscountess Beaconsfield, aged 76 years, wife of the Right Hon. Benjamin Disraeli, M.P., died at the Manor, Hughenden, Bucks, on December 15th, 1872, in the presence of the informant, I. Revely, of 41, Ebury Street, Pimlico, the cause of death certified as carcinoma, pneumonia and bronchitis.

The funeral was private and simple. From the house to the church the coffin was borne by cottage tenants, and Disraeli, who followed, was attended only by his lawyer, Mr. (Sir) Phillip Rose, his secretary, Mr. Montagu Corry (Lord Rowton), and the doctor, Mr. Alfred Leggatt, F.R.C.S. Then came farm tenants and the household staff. Although it was a wet, murky day, the bereaved man remained bareheaded throughout. Mr. Lucy says:

“If an artist desirous of producing a representative of Woe had been present, he might have sketched Disraeli’s face, and left it without a fancy touch. Utterly regardless of the heavy rain, he walked bareheaded the whole distance from the Manor House to the church, and stood for full ten minutes in the sodden grass by the vault, the cold wind playing with his suspiciously dark hair, turning up streaks of white in unexpected places. ‘He’ll have no one to dye his hair for him now she’s gone,’ somebody said,

The Fight Against Death

observing this phenomenon. The remark was made in a tone of unaffected feeling. Rightly considered, it had deep pathos in it, hinting at the domestic confidence that existed between the two, and the manifold little services the wife fondly rendered to the illustrious husband."

It is very probable that she did dye his hair, as well as cut it, but doubtless it was her own secret that she treasured up the locks she had taken off. When the coffin was placed beside those of Mrs. Willyams and James Disraeli, it was observed that there was room for but one other. That space was reserved for Disraeli himself.

Both Disraeli and his wife had realised that her death would mean more to him than the loss of his faithful helpmeet. Frederick Greenwood says with evident truth ("*Encyclopædia Britannica*") that "she would gladly have lived longer, in any afflictions which time brings on, to continue her money-worth to her Dizzy. One of the material effects of his bereavement was that he had at once to set about the painful operation of removing from the house at Grosvenor Gate. It reverted to the Lewis family, by one of whom it is now occupied. His friends did what they could to help and console him. When, after his death, the House of Lords debated the

Mary Anne Disraeli

proposal to place in Westminster Abbey a memorial to him, Lord Malmesbury recalled a pathetic incident. "I remember," he said, "when at last he was deprived of the support of his wife, he said to me with tears in his eyes: 'I hope some of my friends will take notice of me now in my great misfortune, for I have no home, and when I tell my coachman to drive home, I feel it is a mockery.'"

For a time he lived in rooms at Edwards's Hotel in George Street, Hanover Square, but he disliked hotel life, especially in the evening, when he found it "a cave of despair." Eventually he got a house in Whitehall Gardens.



XVI. CHARACTER AND
PERSONALITY





THE facts here, for the first time brought to a focus, will have provided the reader with material for forming an opinion on Lady Beaconsfield's personality and character. Though the picture may be blurred by conflict of testimony, we can at least concur in the judgment passed upon her by the third Earl of Malmesbury, when he first met her at dinner in 1840, that she was "a most extraordinary woman, both in appearance and her conversation." Fifteen years later, when Henry Greville made her acquaintance, he wrote in his diary that "she beggars all description," and left it at that. As she advanced in years her eccentricities were accentuated, and her personal charm faded away. Sir William Gregory went so far as to say that when he knew her "she was a most repulsive woman; flat, angular, underbred, with a harsh, grating voice." But we have reason to take a discount off the gossip of this tattling Irishman. More trustworthy is the tribute of Lady Battersea—graceful, but discriminating. Recalling memories of the old friend of her family, she says in her "Remi-

niscences": "Dear, fond woman! If foolish, and at times even ridiculous, she was a splendid wife. One could smile at her absurdities and love her all the same, or all the better; whilst one admired the temper and the gratitude of the man who was never ruffled by these same absurdities, ever grateful for the devotion that their perpetrator showed him." When Lady Battersea met her in her later years, during a visit to Ashbridge, Lord Brownlow's place in Bucks, "she was getting old, and not at her best, going to sleep after dinner in the drawing-room and waking up rather cross, and asking all manner of random questions. The younger members of the party rather made fun of the gallant old lady and of her queer wig, so often awry, her flame-coloured dresses, her vain attempts at a somewhat youthful appearance; but her husband never seemed cognisant of such a state of things, and preserved his sphinx-like immutability of countenance, and his gracious, half-protective, half-deferential manner to his wife."

There is evidence of a different aspect of her character which it would be as wrong to ignore as to overvalue. Mr. Lucy found marked traces of it when he went to her funeral, but, at the time, recorded only in his diary what he heard of the estimate made of her by her neighbours. High Wycombe, he said,

scrupulously refrained from all expression of sorrow at the death of Lady Beaconsfield.

"It did not," he wrote, "even pay her memory the compliment of close shutters or down-drawn blinds. This abstention from the usual expression of regret at the death of a notable neighbour is a faithful reflex of popular opinion. Lady Beaconsfield was disposed to be exceedingly careful in her expenditure when down in the country, and had, by numerous indications of this turn of mind, given mortal offence to Wycombe. Disraeli had the disadvantage of succeeding in the squiredom of Hughenden, a gentleman who kept something like open house at the Manor, and who is still gratefully remembered as having spent £10,000 a year in Wycombe. The smoke-room of the 'Falcon' was on my arrival last night, full of substantial tradespeople and farmers belonging to High Wycombe and its neighbourhood. The dead lady up at the Manor House was the sole subject of conversation. It was sorrowful to note that there was none to say God bless her!"

Mr. Lucy proceeded to set down some examples given by the company of the lady's parsimony—how she ordered only six rolls for breakfast when the Prince and Princess of Teck came to Hughenden; how another time she ordered a quarter of cheese,

and sent it back because her husband was unexpectedly called to London; how the local band played in honour of Lord Napier of Magdala when he dined at the Manor, and she rewarded them with a paltry half-crown. From all of which we may conclude that Miladi was not held in high esteem by the local tradesmen, accustomed to profiting by the careless prodigality of the "gentry"; but we may conclude also that she was prudent and economical in the management of the household of a man always indifferent to monetary considerations. One who when a child sat on Lady Beaconsfield's knee says she was a favourite with the village children—not a bad test of a woman's character.

We have seen how Sir Stafford Northcote found a pleasing disposition showing through her peculiar mannerisms, and she seems to have given the same impression to most of those in her own circle who came in contact with her. Mr. Gathorne Hardy (Lord Cranbrook) noted in his diary that "with all her eccentricities, she had much that was genial and kind about her." Mr. Kebbel says that while Disraeli had his moments of weariness and despondency, his wife was "always cheerful, always brave; and always devoted." It is no light testimony to her good qualities that she enjoyed the personal friendship of Mr.

Character and Personality

Gladstone, a man of austerity and detachment for whom mere shallowness and frivolity would have no attractions. It may be, indeed, that his sympathies were enlisted by a certain parallelism between his own marital circumstances and those of his rival. There was not much in common between Catherine Gladstone and Mary Anne Disraeli, yet each in her own way contributed in no small degree to the eminent success attained by her husband in the political sphere. Mrs. Disraeli told Mr. Kebbel that after a sharp encounter in the House, Mr. Gladstone would sometimes come round to Grosvenor Gate just to show that he bore no malice. When she died, Gladstone, on behalf of himself and his wife, wrote a pathetic message of condolence. "You and I," he said, "were, as I believe, married in the same year. It has been permitted to both of us to enjoy a priceless boon through a third of a century. Spared myself the blow which has fallen on you, I can form some conception of what it must have been, and must be. I do not presume to offer you the consolation which you will seek from another and higher quarter; I offer only the assurance which all who know you, and all who knew Lady Beaconsfield—and especially those among them who, like myself, enjoyed for a length of time her marked, though unmerited, re-

Mary Anne Disraeli

gard—may perhaps tender without impropriety, the assurance that in this trying hour they feel deeply for you and with you.”

Against Sir William Gregory’s coarse judgment may be set the appreciative testimony of Mr. Motley, the historian. In a letter to Disraeli he said he “always admired her ready wit, her facility and charm in social intercourse, her quick perception of character and events. . . . I never met her in Society without being greeted by a kindly smile and a sympathetic word, and I have frequently enjoyed long, and, to me, most agreeable conversations with her.”

A whimsical sketch of her as she appeared to a young French diplomatist in her declining days is given by M. Maurois. He says: “En 1871 le jeune Chargé d’Affaires de France vit, dans un salon, un être étrange, accoutré en pagoda, qu’il prit pour un vieux rajah. C’était Mary Ann, et derrière elle était Dizzy, fardé, sépulcral, sa dernière boucle teinte en noir et collée sur un front dégarni. Mary Ann portait sur la poitrine, comme on porte la plaque d’un ordre, un immense médaillon encardant le portrait de son mari. Elle avait 80 ans; lui 68. Le couple était ridicule et touchant.”

And what was the lady’s own opinion of her per-

Character and Personality

sonality? It is given in what Mr. Monypenny truly describes as a curious document found among the Beaconsfield papers, and published in the official biography. There is no reason to doubt that it was her own composition, compiled probably about the time of their marriage, in a spirit of candid self-depreciation, not to be taken too seriously. The contrasted qualities of her husband and herself are set out in parallel columns, thus:

Very calm.	Very effervescent.
Manners grave and almost sad.	Gay and happy-looking when speaking.
Never irritable.	Very irritable.
Bad humoured.	Good humoured.
Warm in love but cold in friendship.	Cold in love but warm in friendship.
Very patient.	No patience.
Very studious.	Very idle.
Very generous.	Only generous to those she loves.
Often says what he does not think.	Never says anything she does not think.
It is impossible to find out who he likes or dislikes from his manner. He does not show his feelings.	Her manner is quite different, and to those she likes she shows her feelings.

Mary Anne Disraeli

No vanity.	Much vanity.
Conceited.	No conceit.
No self-love.	Much self-love.
He is seldom amused.	Everything amuses her.
He is a genius.	She is a dunce.
He is to be depended on	She is not to be depended
to a certain degree.	on.
His whole soul is de-	She has no ambition and
voted to politics and	hates politics.
ambition.	

The method of contrasted portraiture here adopted is a temptation to over-statement. Lady Battersea, from personal knowledge, states that Mary Anne was not a dunce, and Mr. Monypenny on a study of the contemporary records was of the same opinion; but when the word is placed antithetically against the undoubted genius of her husband, it is not inappropriate. Indeed, the depreciatory epithets she applies to herself seem in most cases to be designed to emphasise the contrary attributes in Disraeli. In respect of those qualities for which she gives herself credit, her subjective judgment is well supported by the documentary and hearsay evidence. One element in her character—the element of courage—is conspicuously absent from the analysis, possibly because in this case no antithesis was possible.

Character and Personality

She and her husband had at least this in common, that they faced the hazards and trials of life with a fortitude almost heroic. His bitterest enemies, though they might parody contumeliously his motto, "*Forti nihil difficile*," could not but acknowledge and admire his political intrepidity; and in the social sphere he manifested courage of a different kind. And Mary Anne was equally dauntless. That she had "splendid pluck" was the testimony of Sir John Skelton, as of many other observers.

Two of her most prominent characteristics are coupled in another remark made by Skelton: "That her heart is as kind as her taste is queer everyone admits." As we are reminded in proverbial Latin, taste is a matter of opinion. There is no fixed standard in art, no permanence in conceptions of propriety. Many of those who thought her queer had views of adornment and of conduct which are ridiculed by a later generation. It is true, nevertheless, that the judgment of modern Society on her taste in dress, furniture, and manners would not differ materially from that of her contemporaries. Her intellectual qualities also were subject to marked limitations. Her "quick and accurate sense" was the result rather of intuition and mental alertness than of sound reasoning, and her exuberant verbosity—to adapt one of

her husband's famous phrases—lacked refinement. Yet her effervescence was tempered with discretion. Her conversation seems never to have been recklessly irresponsible. Her dominant interest was service to her husband, and where this was concerned she could be more reticent than many highly-cultured wives of statesmen have been. She once told Queen Victoria that she neither knew nor desired to know Cabinet secrets, but she certainly had Disraeli's confidence, and she was never known to betray it. The well-informed writer of *The Times* biography said that despite her habitual volubility, the instinct of her affection set a seal on her lips in the minutest matters where her talk might do him an injury.

In the conspectus of their contrasted characters, she pleads guilty to vanity, while making a nice distinction between that and conceit, which is itself some evidence of acute judgment. But when she declared that she was not to be depended upon, she did herself less than justice, if the test be applied to her relations with Disraeli; and it is by this that she is chiefly to be judged. For it is her unfaltering fidelity to him, and its effect on his career, that gives her a place, honourable if humble, among historic personages.

INDEX

- ABERDEEN, LORD, 9
 Anecdotes, 121
 Argyll, Duke of, 216
 Arms, Coats of, 209-210
- BALMORAL, DISRAELI AT, 196
 Battersea, Lady, 88, 120, 129,
 183, 223, 233
 Beaconsfield, the title, 201
 Beaconsfield, Earl of. *See* Disraeli.
 Beaconsfield, Viscountess. *See*
 Evans.
 Bentincks, 148
 Blessington, Lady, 100, 152
 Bradenham, 75, 93
 Brampford Speke, 30, 37, 43
 Bright, John, 98
 Bryce, Lord, 128
 Buckingham, Duke of, 142
 Buckle, G. E., 19, 179, 204, 222
 Bulwer Lytton. *See* Lytton.
- CATRNS, LORD, 131, 223
 Cathedral House, Gloucester, 49,
 80
 Chaplin, Lord, 148
 Characters contrasted, 239-240
 Cobden, Richard, 98
 Coleridge, Lord Chief Justice,
 128
 Consort, Prince, 191
- Corry, Montagu. *See* Rowton.
 Cranbrook, Lord, 138, 236
- DAWSON, GEORGE, 67
 Dawson, George, Mrs., 67, 115
 Derby, 14th Earl of, 10, 170, 188,
 193
 Derby, 15th Earl of, 194, 206,
 214
 Disraeli, Benjamin: The Young
 Dandy, 62; first meeting with
 Mary Anne, 64; election con-
 tests, 70, 71, 106, 109; court-
 ship, 77; marriage, 95; perfect
 husband, 104; debts, 106, 115,
 148, 177; illness, 165; por-
 traits of, 124, 190; purchase
 of Hughenden, 149; Cabinet
 Minister, 187; Prime Minister,
 193; popularity, 219; bereave-
 ment, 226, 229
 Disraeli, Isaac, 49, 76, 105, 151,
 154
 Disraeli, James, 215
 Disraeli, Mary Anne. *See* Evans.
 Disraeli, Sarah, 151
 D'Orsay, Count, 78, 153
 Duncombe, T. S., and Mrs., 140
- ESHER, LORD, 67
 Evans, family of, 37

Index

- Evans, Eleanor; marriage, 39;
her children, 42; second marriage, 51; death, 80
- Evans, Lieut. John, 38-42
- Evans, John or James, 43
- Evans, Mary Anne, Viscountess Beaconsfield: Mystery of her birth, 23; stories of early life, 24; her age, 31; her parents' families, 37, 45; certificate of birth, 44; marriage to Wyndham Lewis, 54; first meeting with Disraeli, 64; portraits, 67, 158; her fortune, 80; Disraeli's wooing, 82; marriage, 95; political adviser, literary critic, and housewife, 97-105; popularity at Shrewsbury, 111; application to Peel, 3; ingenuous candour, 121; courage, 129, 192, 213, 223, 240; dress, 97, 139, 143, 156, 183; as landscape gardener, 153; illness, 165, 167-170; letters, 105, 113, 165, 173, 196, 207, 222; in society, 174, 181, 189; favours from Queen Victoria, 187, 199, created peeress, ch. 14; last illness and death, 220-227; unpopularity at Wycombe, 235; estimates of character, ch. 16.
- FRASER, SIR WILLIAM, 31, 98, 122, 166
- Froude, J. A., 102, 147, 176
- Fryston Hall, party at, 137
- GALWAY, LORD, 141
- German forest, 155, 157
- Gladstone, W. E., 12, 168, 181, 195, 205, 219, 237
- Gower, Lord Ronald, 157, 224
- Gratitude, Disraeli's, 127
- Greenmeadow, 27, 53, 89
- Gregory, Sir William, 123, 124, 233
- Greville, Henry, 168, 233
- Grey, General, 70, 202
- Grosvenor Gate House, 61, 229
- Gull, Sir William, 220
- HAIR, DISRAELI'S, 104, 228
- Harcourt, Sir W., 122, 224
- Hardinge, Lord, 123
- Hardy, Gathorne-. *See* Cranbrook.
- Hare, Augustus, 27
- Harris, J. H., 24, 28, 43, 53
- Hobhouse, Lady, 30, 152
- Honeymoon tour, 95
- Houghton, Lord, 100, 137, 195
- Hughenden, purchase of, 149; adornment, 153, 157; children's fête, 182
- Hyde Park riot, 191
- JEWISH FAMILIES, 119, 175
- KEBBEL, T. E., 5, 63, 127, 156, 236
- Kidd, Sir Benjamin, 157
- Knightley, Sir Rainald, 206
- LEWIS FAMILY, 53
- Lewis, Wyndham, Dr. Mavor's romance, 24; marriage, 54; election contests, 55-57; friendship with Disraeli, 75; death, 78

Index

- Lewis, Rev. W. P., 79
 Londonderry, Lord, 151
 Lorne, Marquess of, 216
 Louise, Princess, 217
 Lucy, Sir Henry, 226, 234
 Lytton Bulwer, 61, 69, 91
 Lytton Bulwer, Mrs., 64, 78

 MAIDSTONE ELECTIONS, 56, 71
 Malmesbury, Lord, 123, 166, 179, 230, 233
 Manchester, Demonstration at, 219
 Manchester, Duchess of, 190
 Manners, Lord John, 151, 224
 Marlborough, Duchess of, 189
 Maurois, André, 126, 151, 238
 Mabor, James, 24
 Meynell, Wilfrid, 16, 23, 208
 Milliner story, 29
 Montagu, Andrew, 178
 Montefiore, Mrs., 88, 119
 Monypenny, 239
 Motley, J. L., 238
 Mowbray, Sir John, 164
 Munn, Thomas, 39

 NAPOLEON III., 91, 175
 Northcote, Sir Stafford. *See* Id-
 desleigh.
 Novels, Disraeli's, 100, 214

 OSBORNE, BERNAL, 128
 Ossington, Lord. *See* Denison.

 PALMERSTON, LADY, 6, 182
 Paris, visits to, 97, 136, 144
 Parker, Stuart, 113
 Peacocks at Hughenden, 139, 156, 225

 Pearls, 66
 Peel, Lady, 3
 Peel, Sir Robert, 8, 112
 Peerage, precedents for, 201
 Pictures, indelicate, 123
 Portland, Duke of, 156
Punch, 205

 RAIKES, CECIL, 122, 220
 Receptions, political, 6, 14
 Reid, Sir Wemyss, 168
 Robinson, Lionel, 28
 Rose, Sir Phillip, 115, 224, 228
 Rosebery, Earl of, 65, 192, 208, 224
 Rosebery, Countess of, 14
 Rothschild, Lady de, 100, 120, 223
 Rowton, Lord, 32, 192, 228
 Russell, Sir E., 30
 Russell, Lady John, 6
 Ruthven, Lady, 167
 Rutland, Duchess of, 137

 SALISBURY, MARQUESS OF, 11, 215
 Scrope family, 38
 Shrewsbury election, 109
 Sichel, Walter, 130, 194
 Skelton, Sir John, 128, 130, 167, 241
 Smythe, George, 125, 127
 Spencer-Stanhope, Lady Eliza-
 beth, 138
 Stanley, Lord. *See* Derby.
 Stewart, Mrs. Duncan, 27, 159
 Stowe, party at, 142
 "Sybil," dedication of, 99

 THEATRE, VISITS TO, 77, 218

Index

- | | |
|--|--|
| Thompson, Col. Perronet, 70, 209 | Viney, Sir James, 40, 44, 50, 80 |
| Tichborne case, 218 | |
| VERNON-GRAHAMS, 52 | WALES, PRINCE OF (Edward VII), 188, 195, 219 |
| Victoria, Queen, 143, 158, 188, 199, 227 | West, Sir Algernon, 113 |
| Victorian Prime Ministers' wives, 1-16 | Willyams, Mrs. Brydges, 174-178 |
| Viney family, 38, 49 | Woods at Hughenden, 155 |
| | YATE, THOMAS, 51 |
| | Yates, Edmund, 155 |

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